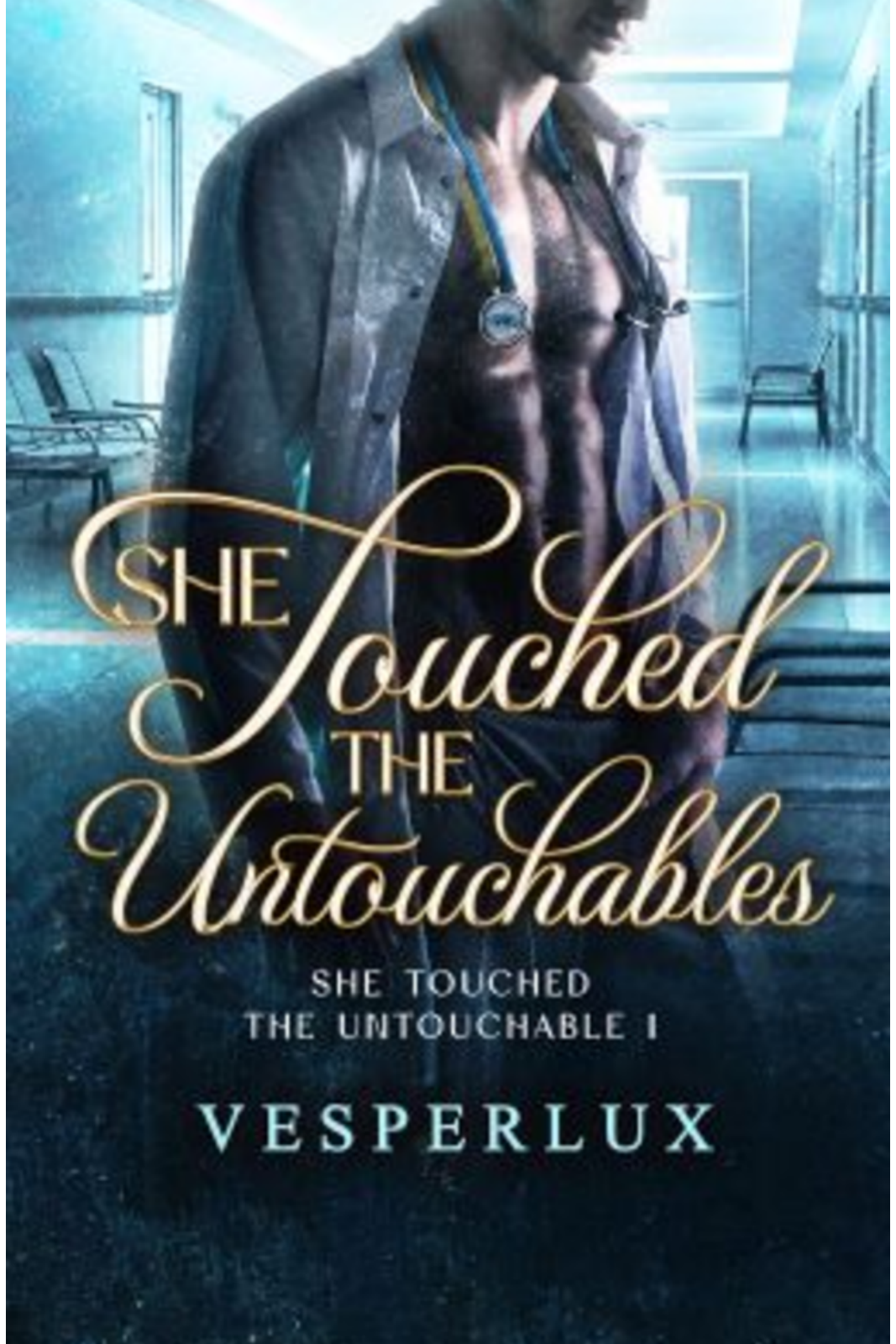
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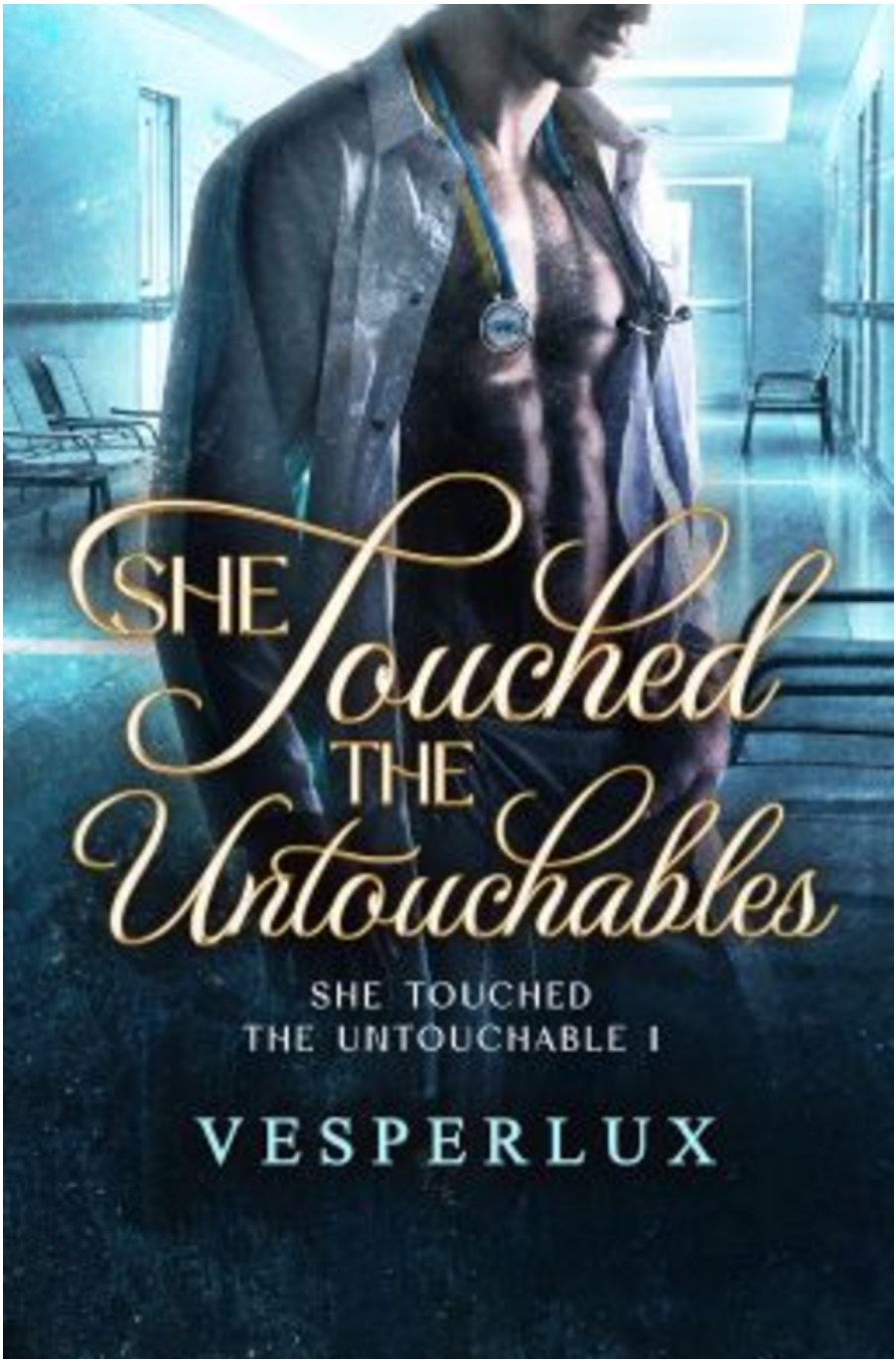
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PROLOGUE

I am very sorry for the excessive cursing of Solana. I will edit those curses po. This is my first story, and I am still learning. Just so you know, this story is currently undergoing major editing. Thank you.

Tinatanaw ko ang malawak na palayan sa harap ko. Maganda. Tahimik. The wind felt cool. The sun wasn't harsh on my skin. Pero habang nakatitig ako, may mabigat sa dibdib ko. I couldn't tell if it was sadness... or shame.

May mga magsasakang nag-aararo. Their clothes were soaked in sweat. Mud clung to their shoes, and their hands trembled from exhaustion. Yet they smiled. As if sanay na sila. As if it's normal for their backs to nearly break from work, while people in the city complain over the smallest things.

And me? I was just standing there, watching them. I didn't know if I should admire them or feel ashamed. Kasi sila, kahit pagod, they can still smile. But me? Kahit maliit na abala lang, I already want to give up.

I closed my eyes when I breathed in the fresh air and heard the chirping of birds. Peace. Finally. But I kept them shut... and that's when I felt it. Parang may tumama sa balakang ko nang hindi ko inaasahan.

"N-Nanay Moning! Naaayyy! Manganganak na ho yata ako!" Napaluha ako at hindi ko na kayang itago ang pangamba. Dito lang ako manganganak—sa bahay. Walang doktor. Walang kama. Walang gamot..

Ang ospital? Apat na oras pa bago marating ang lungsod, at kahit gustuhin man naming pumunta, wala rin kaming pera. I closed my eyes, but not to relax or calm down,only to avoid seeing what I feared the most. Losing my life... or worse, losing my baby.

Every wave of pain felt like a knock on death's door, a reminder that no matter how strong I am, some things are simply beyond my control.

God, please... not now. Not here. Not like this. I was shaking from the pain. Another wave hit, parang may humahaplos sa bituka ko gamit ang blade.

"Tasyong!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning habang nagmamadaling kumuha ng kumot. "Ihanda ang mainit na tubig at palanggana, manganganak na si Inday Sol!

They moved quickly. Soaked towels in hot water and placed them on my belly. It was warm. Comforting. But the pain didn't lessen—not even a little.

I was an intern nurse. I was supposed to know how to handle things like this. Supposed to stay calm. Supposed to be ready.
But right now? I was just scared. I didn't have anyone else here. Just Nanay Moning and Tatay Tasyo—and even if they tried their best, this wasn't something warm water and old prayers could fix.

"Day Solana, uminom ka nitong hilaw na itlog para hindi mahirapan lumabas ang bata," sabi ni Nanay Moning, hawak-hawak ang baso na nanginginig na rin.Hindi na ako nagtanong. Wala na akong lakas.

Ganito rin ang ginawa ng ilang taga-rito nang sila'y manganak. Sana effective. Kahit hindi ako naniniwala, kahit may duda pa rin ako sa loob, tinanggap ko.

Kasi sa ngayon... kaunting pag-asa lang ang meron ako. At kapit na ako doon.Manganganak ako dito nang walang anesthesia. Kaya sana, umepekto 'yung hilaw na itlog. Kahit papaano. Kahit kaunti.

"Naaayyyyy, lalabas na ho yata!"

Dali-dali nila akong tinulungan para makahiga sa banig. The bed was made of bamboo, with some blankets placed on top para kahit papaano'y maging comfortable. The towels were ready... pati na rin ang mga dahon na hindi ko naman kilala. I didn't know if they were medicine or part of a prayer, pero hindi na ako nagtanong.

As long as the baby comes out. As long as they're safe. As long as both of us... survive.

Right now, I'm placing my trust in Nanay Moning. Siya ang kilalang tagapaanak dito sa aming sitio. I had no one else to rely on but her.

"Inday, nakikita ko na ang ulo ng bata. Sige, ire ka, anak!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning, habang pinipigilan ang kaba sa boses niya. Para akong

malalagutan ng hininga. Parang may pwersang humahati sa katawan ko.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" Napasigaw ako. Napakasakit. Masakit na parang hindi na matatapos.

"Arggggghhhhhhhh!"

It felt like my body was being torn open from the inside. The pain was sharp, deep, and wild, like fire crawling through every nerve in my spine and gut. My hips felt like they were being pried apart, my lower back felt like it would snap. My breath hitched. My vision blurred.

I was shaking. I wanted to scream louder, but even my voice was tired.

Still, I pushed. I had to.

"Nakita ko na ang ulo! Sige, isang iri na lang!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Then suddenly. I heared a cry. A loud, clear, beautiful cry.

"Inday Sol! Lalaki! Malusog! Abay napaka gwapo naman nitong baby namin!" But Nanay Moning's face changed. She looked down again.

"Inday, umiri ka pa. May isa pa!" Twins. My heart skipped a bit. My body wanted to give up. But I clenched my jaw.

"One more," I whispered to myself, I'm barely holding on. I sobbed, quiet at first, then louder, until my whole body shook.

"Nanay, parang hindi ko na yata kaya" ani ko as I closed my eyes.

"Nanay Moning... parang hindi ko na yata talaga kaya," I whispered, my voice trembling, caught between a sob and a scream. That wasn't just pain speaking, it was defeat.

Parang may mabigat na pinto na unti-unting sumasara sa loob ko. My strength was slipping through the cracks. Ang bawat iri, parang hinuhugot ang kaluluwa ko.

Tumingala ako. Everything was spinning. Naalala ko agad si Malrick. Hindi ko napigilang maiyak.

Malrick... Malrick, kailangan kita. Kailangan na kailangan kita ditoooo. Sabi mo hindi mo ako pababayan. Sabi mo hindi mo ako iiwan.

Habang humihikbi ako,pinilit kong magpakatatag , pero ang puso ko, parang gusto nang sumuko. Gusto kong marinig ang boses niya. Gusto kong siya 'yung humawak sa kamay ko habang pinagdadaanan ko 'to.

Pero wala siya. Wala siya dito, kahit anino.

Ako lang. Ako, si Nanay Moning, at ang kirot na parang walang katapusan. Nanay Moning leaned closer, her hands firm but gentle on my shaking legs, a rosary wrapped tightly around her fingers. A rosary, I suddenly remembered Mother superior. Napahikbi ako ng malakas.

"Kaya mo pa, anak. Konti na lang ha. Konti na lang talaga," she whispered. May tumulong luha sa mata niya, pero pinunasan lang niya ito ng likod ng kamay. Her voice didn't shout. It didn't command.

"One last... push..." I whispered

"ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH ahhhhhhhh argghhhhhhhhhh" I pushed. Isa... dalawa... tatlo , hanggang sa marinig ko ang iyak ng sanggol.

A baby. . . Alive. I made it, we made it. Pero hindi ko na maigalaw ang katawan ko.

Nakatingala lang ang mga mata ko sa kisame, nanginginig ang pilik-mata, habang unti-unti akong nilalamon ng pagod at takot. Naramdaman ko ang init ng dugong dumadaloy mula sa aking ibaba, malakas at mainit na kapareho ng luhang dumadaloy sa pisngi ko.

Nagdidilim na ang paningin ko. Parang unti-unti akong hinihila ng malamig na kamay sa isang lugar na walang ingay, walang ilaw, walang buhay.

Parang gusto na akong kunin ng paningin ko. Parang tinatawag na ako ng dulo. Pero ayoko. Hindi pwede..

Ayokong sumama. Ayokong mawala. Gusto kong sumigaw. Gusto kong tawagin si Nanay Moning. Gusto kong hawakan ang kamay niya at ipagpilitang.....

"Nanay... ayoko pa. Ayoko pang mamatay..."

Ang lalamunan koy tuyong-tuyo na. Ang katawan ko ay wala nang lakas. Pero ang puso ko? Puno pa rin ng takot... at pag-asa.

Gusto kong makita ang mga anak ko. Gusto kong mahawakan sila. Gusto kong marinig ang iyak nila habang gising pa ako.

Gusto kong masabi kay Malrick...
"Mahal, may kambal tayo. Buhay sila. Asan ka ba?"

At habang lumulubog ako sa dilim, isa lang ang paulit-ulit kong sinasambit sa isip ko.

"Panginoon... huwag pa po ngayon."

CHAPTER 1

"Solana, anak, Diyos ko! Bakit hindi ka nagsabi na dadalaw ka? Ikaw talagang bata ka," Mother Superior exclaimed as soon as she saw me.

She held my face like I was about to disappear, her hands trembling as her eyes welled up with tears.

She stared at me with so much love, like no time had passed at all. It had been three years since I last visited this place, *Heart and Home,* the orphanage where I grew up.

"Kumusta ka na? Bakit namamayat ka? Solana, Diyos ko, ano bang pinaggagagawa mo? Sabi ko naman sa ’yo, umuwi ka na lang dito." Her voice cracked with concern.

Then she turned to the hallway and shouted, "Sister Luna! Sister Sally! Nandito si Solana! Halika kayo!"

Mother Superior was the one who raised me. She always told me the story of how she found me outside the orphanage gate, wrapped in a thin blanket with a small piece of paper tucked near my chest. Written on it was a name: Solana Rouri Suarez.

I smiled when I saw how Sister Luna let the laundry fall from her hands as she ran toward me and hugged me tightly, gano’n din si Sister Sally. Sa dami ng mga sisters dito, sa kanila ako pinaka-naging attached.

"Okay naman po ako, Mother Superior, Sister Luna, and Sister Sally. Mahirap po ang buhay sa labas pero baon ko po ang mga habilin niyo sa akin," sabi ko at tumulo na ang luhang kanina ko pa pinipigilan.

Hindi rin napigilang umiyak ni Mother Superior.

"Salamat naman at hindi mo kami kinalimutan dito, Sol. Napakabait mong bata. Parati ka naming pinagdarasal, araw-araw, na sana makamit mo ang buhay na pinagdarasal mo noon pa man," masayang ani ni Sister Sally habang ang mga mata niya’y lumuluha.

"Naku! Kahit maging president pa ako, Sister Sally, dala-dala ko po kayo rito sa aking puso," I said jokingly at pilit na nagpapatawa para mabasag ang bigat ng sandali.

"Abay, tama na iyang mga drama natin. Magmeryenda muna tayo," Sister Luna said happily.

Pagkatapos kong makausap sina Mother Superior, Sister Luna, at Sister Sally, I stayed for a bit and played with the kids. They were laughing non-stop carefree, light, like the world never hurt them.

For a moment, I wanted to stay. But I couldn’t. I had to leave before I got stuck in traffic on the way to Demirian Memorial Hospital.

Suot ko ’yong simpleng puting blusa at itim na pants, 'yung black doll shoes ko, nabili ko pa sa Divisoria dalawang taon na ang nakalipas.

Medyo gasgas na sa gilid, pero malinis pa rin. Ayos pa naman tingnan, basta huwag lang masyadong lapitan.

Tumingala ako. It was massive. Spotless. It didn't feel like a hospital, it looked like a cathedral built for medicine. Or maybe a five-star hotel with a heart monitor. The place screamed perfection.

Suddenly, I felt small. It was like every insecurity I buried started walking beside me. I sighed heavily.

What if they find out I came from an orphanage?
What if they notice my cheap shoes or that I didn’t even have time to comb my hair properly?

But it’s too late now. I’m here. I made it. This is it. *Dreams*

I gripped the strap of my bag, took a deep breath, and stepped inside. I was heading toward the entrance when I spotted Simon near the guard, holding his phone.

He seemed to be texting someone, and his face looked a little worried.

"Hoy! Sinong ka-text mo?" tanong ko sabay hampas sa balikat niya.

Nanlaki ang mata niya, parang hindi siya makapaniwalang nakita niya ako sa harap niya mismo.

Siguro masasabi kong komportable ako kay Simon. Hindi siya naka-iilang, awkward minsan, oo, pero harmless naman.

"S-Suarez... you’re here. I was actually about to chat you kasi ikaw na lang ’yong hinihintay nila," sabi niya, hindi man lang makatingin nang diretso sa akin.

'"Tangina? Eh wala pa nga 1 PM!"

Tumingin ako agad sa phone ko. 12:45 pa lang.

Grabe naman, ang aga-aga kong napa-pressure. Ang bilis pa man din ni Manong Eddie magpatakbo kanina sa jeep, parang may hinahabol kami.

"I actually don't know din," dagdag pa ni Simon habang naglalakad kami.

"Come on, and why can't I find your name on Facebook? sa Instagram kalang ba active?" tanong niya

Napairap ako nang bahagya. Ganito ba talaga ang isang 'to?

"Sorry ha, hindi smartphone cellphone ko, keypad lang," sabi ko habang inilabas ko sa bulsa ang luma kong Nokia.

Pinakita ko sa kanya 'yong classic na model, 'yong tipong mas matibay pa sa feelings ko.

Bahagya siyang ngumiwi, halatang hindi sanay sa ganung itsura ng phone. Siguro iniisip niya kung paano ako nabubuhay nang walang Messenger, camera, o kahit Facebook app.

"Hoy! Huwag ka! At least 'yong phone ko hindi madaling ma-lowbat at puwede pang pampukpok sa holdaper kung sakali. Kaya ikaw." Turo ko sa kanya

"Umayos ka sa akin kung ayaw mong mapokpok nito." His eyes widened as his ears became red, and he looked in another direction.

Gago, kinikilig yata 'to?

Habang naglalakad kami papunta sa orientation room, I couldn't even find the right words to describe what I was seeing. The interior was nothing like the hospitals I knew.

It was spotless, like a private hotel disguised as a medical facility. The floor tiles were so polished they looked like mirrors, and the walls were painted in soft neutral colors—beige, ivory.

May malalaking sofa sa receiving area, hindi 'yong pangkaraniwang matigas—they were plush, elegant, and looked like they belonged in a high-end lounge. There were tall indoor plants placed in minimalist designer pots, and the air smelled like a mix of lavender.

Bango.

But the most intimidating part? The nurses we passed by looked like they just stepped out of a skincare commercial. Hindi lang yata credentials ang qualification dito, kailangan yata glowing ka rin.

Their hair was neatly tied, their scrubs perfectly fitted, and their posture screamed confidence. Napalunok ako.

What am I even doing in a place like this?

I suddenly felt very underdressed, underqualified, and out of place.

"We're here, Suarez," Simon said, snapping me out of the dramatic movie montage running in my head.

He opened the door labeled HEAD NURSE'S OFFICE, and I followed him in. Inside were a few familiar faces ,and by the looks of it, halos lahat dean's lister.

Great. So basically, I just walked into a room full of brain cells in human form.

Uupo na sana kami nang biglang bumukas ang pinto sa kabilang side. Lumabas ang isang babae, late 30's siguro. Makinis, maganda, sophisticated. 'Yong itsura niya? Parang kahit may eye bags, branded pa rin. Alam mong hindi basta-basta natutuyuan ng moisturizer.

"Good morning, everyone," she said with a smile that looked expensive.

Mukha pa lang ng head nurse, alam mong bawal ang bara-barang energy rito.

CHAPTER 2

"Good morning and welcome to Demirian Memorial Hospital. My name is Netjen. I'm the newly assigned head nurse here," she began talking confidently, standing tall like she runs this hospital and probably the whole city, if she wanted to.

"I believe I won't need to spoon-feed you information about this hospital, since I know most of you already know how amazing it is, it's beyond extraordinary. So, without further ado, I will divide you into four groups, since there are twelve OJTs in total."

My heart was racing like may utang ako sa hospital mismo. I could feel the sweat gathering in places I didn't even know could sweat. Kailangan ko makinig sa mga sinasabi nila.

Damn! Focus Solana.

"Go to your team as I call your name," she continued.

Hinihintay ko na matawag ang pangalan ko.

"Santi Navarro, Donna Fuentes and Angi Agustin will be assigned to Pediatrics Department."

Patuloy lamang ako sa pakikinig sa pagtawag nila ng pangalan.

"Mr. Simon Dela Paz, Ms. Solana Rouri Suarez, and Ms. Ericka Rain Santos will be assigned to the Surgical Department."

Surgical Department. Pumikit ako sandali, at dumilat ulit.

Seryoso ba 'to? Surgery agad?

Baka naman kutsara ang maabot ko kapag scalpel ang hiningi. Baka ako ang ma-operahan sa kaba.

Napatingin sa akin sina Simon at Ericka. Naka-smile pa rin sila, parang hindi affected. Totoo nga siguro 'yong sabi nila sa bahay ampunan, may nunal daw ako sa puwet.

Saan na ang tapang ko?

Parang gusto ko na agad mag-resign kahit wala pa akong first shift.

After Nurse Netjen finished assigning the remaining OJTs to their departments, she clapped once and said,

"Surgical team, follow me. I will introduce you to Dr. Demirian."

Sinundan namin siya palabas ng opisina. Napalunok ako nang malalim nang makita kong pinindot niya ’yong button ng pinakamataas na floor sa elevator. Oh no. That means he’s not just some regular doctor, he’s something way higher than that.

My hands and legs are trembling from nervousness.

Takte.

Kung alam ko lang na ganito kakaba, nag-culinary na lang sana ako. At least matutulungan ko pa si Aling Bebang magluto ng ulam ’di tulad ngayon na baka ako pa ang main course.

"We’re here. Prepare yourselves," Nurse Netjen said as the elevator dinged.

The doors slid open, and we stepped out onto the top floor. We waited just outside the glass office while she spoke to Dr. Demirian’s secretary, at least I think that’s who he was.

Based on what I saw, may girl aura si kuya. I’m not sure if he’s gay or just very... graceful. Pero kung ako ang tatanungin, he’s definitely serving soft realness.

Maayos ang buhok, may pa-powder, at may hawak pang gold pen, and he’s wearing thick glasses.

The secretary finally stood up, smiled, and said, "You may come in. Dr. Demirian will be here any minute. He’s still in a meeting, my apologies."

He eyed each one of us and continued to talk. "He instructed me to let you wait inside his office."

The moment the doors opened, my jaw almost hit the expensive-looking floor. The office was massive. Cold. Immaculate. Intimidating.

The walls were matte black and deep gray. Walang kahit anong abubot just clean lines, sharp corners, and everything in perfect order. The desk? Huge. Made of dark glass and steel. Parang hindi ginagamit pang-trabaho, kundi pang-dictate ng kapalaran ng buong bansa.

On top of it was a single black-and-gold nameplate Dr. Malrick Virellus Valtar O. Demirian III Executive Medical Director. Heir to the Demirian Empire.

Putek. Ang haba. Ang bigat.

Ang mahal pakinggan. That name sounded like it could buy and sell my entire existence without even blinking.

Behind it was a full wall of floor-to-ceiling glass windows, giving a view of the entire city below, jet-black leather chairs and the minimalist bookshelves that held thick, expensive-looking medical journals arranged by size and color.

No pictures. No mess. No signs of personal life. Even the air smelled rich parang disinfectant na may Hermes. I was enjoying observing every detail in the office when the double doors opened and someone spoke...

"Good morning."

A deep, thunderous voice echoed through the room as the double oak doors opened.

Lord, hindi lang boses parang may lindol sa vocal cords niya. It sent chills down my spine.

I couldn’t see his face right away nakatalikod ako sa kanya. He walked silently toward his table, the ticking of his expensive leather shoes , the only sound you could hear in the office.

But the moment the head nurse greeted him, along with my teammates, I instinctively looked up. Gusto kong bumati. Pero ’yong boses ko?

Nawawala. Parang binura ng kaba. Grabe na buhay ’to, bakit ngayon pa?

So instead, I forced a polite, tiny smile... the kind you give when you don’t know whether to curtsy or faint.

That’s when his eyes landed on me. Correction, examined me. From head to toe. Like I was an X-ray he didn't order, but he already found the flaw.

I swear, in that half-second our eyes met, I felt like he could see

everything, my late rent, my ₱20 jeep fare, at ang ulam na nakalimutan ko sa loob ng bag ko, pati na rin ’yong mental breakdown ko two weeks ago. Parang kitang-kita niya.

Doctor pa lang ’to, bakit feeling ko nasa trial na ako sa langit? I was in a deep thought when Nurse Netjen started introducing us, mentioning our university, academic records, and awards. It sounded like she was reading from a script.

"Dr. Demirian, these are the interns assigned to the surgical department. They are from Don Valtar’s University, and they are also dean’s listers," she paused before continuing, "Their names are..."

But before she could finish, her words were cut short when the man in front of us spoke.

"I want them to introduce themselves one by one, Nurse Netjen," he said calmly. No anger, no raised voice—just enough authority to freeze the entire room.

"Let them talk," he added. Then, his eyes shifted to me.

Napalunok ako. I suddenly felt like my throat turned into ashes. I wanted to disappear or maybe fake a signal loss kahit wala namang Zoom meeting.

I didn’t even know which would be worse, being the first to speak or waiting long enough for my brain to explode from overthinking.

Either way, I was sure of one thing: this man was not someone you say no to.

CHAPTER 3

Ericka was the first to introduce herself, followed by Simon. Hindi ako mapakali habang nagsasalita sila. Lahat sila, parang may sariling LinkedIn bio, enumerating their achievements, awards, and even their family backgrounds like they were royalty.

Ako lang yata naliligaw sa grupong ito.

I almost shrank. Ericka's family owns a pharmaceutical company. Simon, apparently, is the only son of our university president.

Ako? Wala. I don't have a reputable name. Wala akong business na mamanahin. I'm not even sporty. I don't have medals, I don't join competitions, and the only certificate I ever got was "Best in Cleaning Whiteboard" at "Most talkative" back in Grade 3.

Grabe ang mga background nila at walang-wala ako sa kanila.

I wanted to sink through the floor. Or at least magka-ubo para makalabas ng room with a bit of dignity. Dahil sa nararamdaman kong hiya ay ang daming pumapasok sa isipan ko para matakasan ito.

Siniko ako ni Simon nang mapansin niyang halos two minutes na pa lang lahat kami naka-pause, parang may nag-time freeze.

Lahat nakatingin na sa 'kin, pati 'yong potted plant sa sulok feeling ko hinihintay din ako magsalita. Bahala na. Kung mapahiya, at least may audience.

Huminga ako ng malalim na kumukuha ng lakas ng loob. Hindi puwede ipakita ko sa kanila na nahihiya ako.

"My name's Solana Rouri Suarez. I'm 22 years old po. I'm a consistent dean's lister in our university," pakilala ni Solana na kinasinghap ko ng mahina.

Tangina, nanginginig ka pa talaga, Solana?

Bakit ang grabe ng background mo, samantalang sa akin na parang kabute ang background.

Napaka-basic ng intro ko, parang recitation sa Grade 5. I knew it was too short the moment I saw Dr. Demirian's eyes darken, as if my lack

of detail personally offended his soul. Kahit si Nurse Netjen napakapit sa clipboard at tumikhim, trying to encourage me to speak more.

Simon, on the other hand, was suddenly very interested in the ceiling, parang nagdadasal na matapos na ’tong eksena ko sa buhay nila. Ito talaga ang kanina ko pa iniisip.

"I-I may not have a reputable family name or background. My last name doesn't come with a company or a hospital wing attached to it. My parents aren't doctors, CEOs, or even alive, actually. I grew up in an orphanage. The only thing I inherited was a secondhand notebook and a dream I probably can't even afford," kinakabahan kong sambit habang halatang nauutal ako.

I glanced at Nurse Netjen, she looked relieved, like she had been holding her breath. Even Simon seemed frozen where he stood, like he wasn’t expecting any of that. But I wasn’t finished.

Kahit na ganito ang speech ko ay kailangan maipaliwanag ko sa kanila ang sarili ko.

"But I showed up. I work hard. If it means staying up all night just to review, I will. If it means commuting 2 hours and still arriving early, I’ve done it. I’ve balanced three jobs just to pay for tuition. I sell food. I do errands. I write papers for other people just so I can write my own someday—with ’M.D.’ at the end of my name, so no, I don’t come from power. But I came prepared," dagdag ko pang sambit.

I’ll thank Mother Superior later over the phone, *kasi effective ’yong panalangin niya this time.*

Doc Dermirian, stared me for a while, nakakailang kaya umiwas ako ng tingin. Tumikhim siya at starting to scan our profiles, calm, unreadable, terrifyingly precise.

And since *lahat ng mata ay nasa kanya*, I figured, okay, *my turn to do the examining* I guess?

His grey-green eyes. Not just grey. Not just green. Grey-green. The kind of color you only see in storm clouds right before they ruin your entire day.

Jawline? Glowing. Sharp. *Perfectly umiigting habang ngumunguya siguro ng pride ng mga interns*? Napahagikhik ako sa isipan

If that jaw could talk, it would say, "You are not on my level." I’m 80%

sure it could slice bread.

His nose? Please. It wasn't just a nose, it was *an architectural masterpiece*. Straight, smooth, and perfectly placed.

This man didn't have pores, he had polished marble for skin. The kind of skin that looks like it's never met stress, pimples, or real-life humidity. Walang tigyawat, walang pores, walang karapatan ang oiliness sa balat niya.

'Yong tigyawat ko nga nahihiyang tumubo, parang sila na 'yong nag-a-adjust.

"Uy guys, huwag dito. Hindi pantay. Alanganin tayo," sambit ng isang boses.

They form a committee before erupting. Democratic pa.

Pambihirang buhay 'to.

He has a fair white skin. Alam na alam ko ang mga ganto, iyong tipong maiinitan ay mamumula lang hindi iitim. Hindi kaya ko na halos lahat nalang ng notebook ko itakip ko sa mukha ko para hindi masunog dahil naka rejuvenating set ako na walang sunscreen. Hinding-hindi na 'yon mauulit. Nabudol lang ako ni Aling Krosana.

And there was a watch on his wrist, black, sleek, and way too expensive-looking to just be called a "watch." Definitely not something you'd find in a mall. Not even in a glass case. Maybe inside a vault.

He's wearing a crisp black coat, neatly folded over his elbow, Black tailored pants hugged his legs just right.

He was a walking *Greek tragedy with a doctorate and a scalpel*. If he walked into the ocean, I swear the waves would part.

And the worst part?

He knew it. He knew his fine as hell.

"I'll have my secretary schedule them to assist in my surgery next week," he said—calm, deep, and final.

Then he looked at me.
Not a glance. Not a casual eye contact. No, he eyed me like he was scanning through my soul, my blood type, and my last five sins.

Parang alam niya kung ilang beses akong nag-extend ng deadline sa professor ko.
My spine straightened on instinct. My lungs forgot how to breathe. Even my tigyawat on the side of my chin paused its development.

Grabeng buhay ’to.

CHAPTER 4

Pinauwi kami agad ni Nurse Netjen since it's just the first day and wala pa naman daw masyadong gagawin. Maybe for them, that’s true , pero ako?

May plano ako. While we were on our way earlier, I spotted a five-star restaurant right next to the hospital. Sosyal. Mukhang mahal ang tubig doon, pero hindi ako pupunta para kumain , I want to apply for a part-time job.

Okay na rin ’yon, para after shift ko sa Demirian Memorial Hospital, derecho na ako roon. Isang lakaran lang, hindi ko na kailangan gumastos sa pamasahe. Nag-resign na rin kasi ako sa fast food na katabi ng school namin.

Mahal ko ’yong trabaho pero mas mahal ang oras ko ngayon. Sayang ang lakad kung puwede namang isang diretsong biyahe lang ng bahay.

"Manong Guard? Saan po pwedeng mag-apply bilang waitress?" tanong ko, trying to sound confident kahit alam kong obvious na hindi ako taga-rito nag full body scan siya.

From my tired face down to my Divisoria doll shoes na halatang sawang-sawa na sa buhay.

Tumigil talaga siya sa sapatos ko. Matibay ’to, ’no. Baka nga mas may work experience pa ’tong sapatos ko kaysa sa kanya. pero tinuro nya naman kong saan puwede mag-submit ng resume.

"We are in need of a waitress tonight, actually," sabi ng manager na halos kasing-pino ng menu nila. "You can start now. Your shift will be from 8:30 to 12:30 a.m. Are you sure you can commit yourself to this job?"

Ngumiti ako. Ma’am, kung commitment ang pag-uusapan, I’ve been committed to surviving since birth.

"Yes, Ma’am, makaka-asa po kayo," ani ko at binigyan siya ng matamis na ngiti.

Pero habang tumatagal hindi ko Alam kong tama ba pa itong pinasok ko. Gusto ko magsisi sa naging desisyon kong magtrabaho rito, pero mas magsisisi ako kung palalayasin ako ni Aling Krosana dahil

dalawang buwan na akong hindi nakapagbayad ng renta.

"Solana, table 14."

"Solana, VIP room please."

"Solana, mali raw order ng table 4."

"Solana, may nabasag na baso sa table 9."

Napabangon ako dahil sa lintik na bangungot na ’yon. Kahit ba naman sa panaginip, ulilang puyat pa rin ako.

Pagtingin ko sa orasan na nasa ibabaw ng maliit Kong mesa, 5 a.m na. Hindi na ako bumalik sa tulog—baka ma-late pa ako. Kaya nag-saing na lang ako, tapos nilagyan ng cornbeef sa ibabaw. Tipid meal pero big time sa energy.

Mayamaya, dumating na si Aling Bebang para ihatid ang mga orders niya. Kaunti pa lang ang umuorder sa akin ngayon, kasi bago pa lang naman ako sa hospital. Pero habang nagbabalot ako ng ulam, napaisip ako... puwedeng i-try ang mga ito kay Dr. Demirian?

Eh kung mabentahan ko siya? Malay natin, sa sobrang yaman niya, baka bumili siya ng isang bandehado, tapos ipauwi niya sa mga doktor niyang walang time kumain.

O, baka naman i-report niya ako sa HR, tapos tanggal ako agad, kaya huwag na lang.

Dali-dali lang akong naligo at pumunta sa terminal ng mga jeep.

"Manong, isang Demirian Hospital po," sabi ko habang inaabot ang bayad na ₱25.

Suot ko ang nude fitted t-shirt, paired with my usual black pants na sinuot ko na rin kahapon and black doll shoes ilang beses nang sumuray pero never umaray.

Papasok na ako sa entrada ng hospital nang makita ko si Nurse Kael. Nakilala ko siya kahapon, mabait, singkit ang mata, at matangkad, kaya hindi ko na pinalampas at binigay ko na ang mga menu ni Aling Bebang.

Pero kahit matangkad siya, mas matangkad pa rin si Dr. Demirian sa kanya. B*akit nasali sa usapan si Dr. Demirian?* Hindi naman siya part ng height competition ng puso ko.

Sol, umayos ka. Baka makurot pa singit mo ni Mother Superior sa panaginip.

Ano ba itong mga pumapasok sa isipan ko? Ganito ba talaga kapag stress na sa buhay?

"Nurse Kael, heto na ’yong order mong clubhouse sandwich. ₱150 lang ’yan," sabi ko habang inabot ko sa kanya, sabay bigay ng matipid pero charming kong ngiti.

"Oh, hey Nurse Solana! Thank you for this. This is great since I haven’t eaten my break—"

Naputol ang sasabihin niya nang biglang may bumusina sa likod namin, malakas, matinis, at punong-puno ng urgency.

Sabay kaming napalingon sa likoran namin. Namutla si Nurse Kael nang makita ang sasakyang papalapit. Makinis, mababa, at tila lumulutang habang umiilaw ang mga headlight nito, isang kulay abong Aston Martin na tila sumasalamin sa langit na maulap.

Tumigil ito ilang pulgada lang mula sa amin, at kahit naka-idle lang ang makina, ramdam ang panginginig ng lupa sa ilalim namin.

Alam ko na agad kung sino ang may-ari ng sasakyang ’yon, hindi lang basta ordinaryong kotse, it’s *his* car.
A car that screams power, money, and danger. Kahit hindi pa bumababa ang salamin, parang nagsisigawan na ang lahat ng alarm bells sa loob ng dibdib ko.

Ilang segundo lang pero parang ang tagal bago unti-unting bumaba ang heavily tinted na salamin, revealing the man behind the wheel.

Namutla rin ako nang bumaba ang tinted na salamin ng gray Aston Martin niya. He was wearing dark sunglasses, one hand resting on the window, the other still on the wheel. He’s wearing a light blue polo. The sleeves were folded carefully just below the elbows, revealing strong, veined forearms that looked both elegant and intimidating. His left wrist bore a sleek silver watch.

Hindi ko alam kung anong dapat kong maramdaman. Galit ba? Takot? O ’yong kilig na ayaw kong aminin *Langya Solana! Hindi ’yan.*

He wasn't even looking at me—pero bakit parang ako ang tinutusok ng tingin niya?

"G-Good morning po, Doc..." I stammered.

His eyes darkened upon hearing my greeting, parang may apoy sa tingin niya.

Kung literal lang na nagbubuga ng apoy ang mga mata niya, kanina pa siguro ako bumulagta't naging abo sa kinatatayuan ko. Pero hindi niya ako pinansin. Instead, he looked straight at Nurse Kael.

"Mr. Paraz, we have an urgent meeting in five minutes," he said coldly as he continues

"Why the hell are you still here, loitering—or should I say, luring an intern now?"

My eyes widened. His words hurt.
I was just delivering an order... I didn't mean anything else. I'm just trying to make a living.

"D-Doc good morning po," Nurse Kael greeted him nervously, "Uh.. Nurse Solana just gave me this sandwich po," paliwanag niya pa.

I immediately nodded with agreement. Pero agad ding nahinto dahil tiningnan niya ako ng masama.

"You're his personal chef now?" he said sarcastically.

Hilaw akong napangiti at umiling. Bakit ba galit ang isang 'to?

"Naku! Hindi ho Doc, paninda ko po ito," ani ko sabay hinalungkat ang bag ko baka gusto niya ring bumili.

"G-Gusto niyo rin po ba? May egg sandwich po ako dito at–" naputol ang sasabihin ko nang nagsalita siya

"I don't eat that stuff."

Agad akong napahinto at mukhang napahiya.

"O-Okay po, Doc," ani ko na lang at umatras na.

He even glared at Nurse Kael before he continued to drive away.

"Ang bitter niya sa buhay," bulong ko na lang.

Sungit talaga, pasalamat na lang at nadala sa mukha niya.

CHAPTER 5

Simon and Ericka were talking about medical terms. I was just quietly listening, pretending to be interested in "tachycardia" and "hypokalemia," but honestly, my brain had checked out.

I couldn’t stop thinking about the scene earlier with Dr. Demirian. He might give me a 3 or worse, fail me.

My knees felt weak the moment I realized that. I wasn't sure if it was anxiety or the fact that I skipped breakfast... again. I looked calm on the outside, but inside? I was drafting apology letters, planning my backup career as a waitress.

We were suddenly interrupted by a loud bang from the double doors where the three of us had been staying.

"Intern nurses are required to assess the patients in the lobby!"

We immediately followed the order. I think he’s a friend of Nurse Kael, his steps were fast and firm, like something urgent was happening.

I felt dizzy. I hadn’t eaten anything yet, but I didn’t mind. The patients needed me more.

The moment we arrived in the lobby, we were met with cries, screams, and panic. We were trained for situations like this. I immediately assessed a child crying in the corner, blood all over his face. A deep cut ran across his forehead. I did what I had to do, no time to hesitate.

I looked around and saw Dr. Demirian, calm, sharp, and commanding, giving orders like a general in the middle of a battlefield.

Our eyes met for a second, and something in his gaze made it hard to breathe. I was the one who looked away first, suddenly overwhelmed by the dizziness creeping in again.

Damn it, Solana. Get a grip. I scolded myself silently, forcing my feet to move. There was no time to be weak. I pushed the lightheadedness aside and proceeded to the next patient.

****

"Suarez, Ericka wants us to have lunch outside to chill, since we did a great job earlier according to Nurse Netjen," Simon said, inviting me with a hopeful look in his eyes.

As much as I wanted to join them, I didn't have any money. But there was no way on earth I'd tell them that.

"Salamat, Simon, pero sa susunod na lang. May importante pa akong gagawin, alam mo na, pagkakakitaan... part-time jobs," I replied, forcing a small smile.

Nahihiya rin ako kay Nurse Kael dahil sa nangyari kanina.

Of course, that was just an excuse. I didn't have anything important to do. I was just planning to eat at the fire exit stairs. The thought of cold rice with corned beef on top made my stomach growl even louder.

"Sure, no problem, Suarez." He simply nodded and gave me a polite smile in return.

Simon is very kind—too kind, actually. Napag-alaman ko na crush niya raw ako. If I had a peso for every time someone teased me about it in the class, I'd probably afford lunch with them right now.

I was humming to myself and holding the strap of my bag when, walked straight into what I thought was a wall. Grabe, ang sakit no'n! My forehead was practically ringing. But when I looked up... plot twist. It wasn't a wall. It was a man.

A *man*.

Dr. Demirian.

Great. Of all the walking anatomy models in this hospital, I just had to crash into the Greek statue with a license.

"Are you blind or something?" he snapped, his tone sharp enough to cut through bone.

"Watch where the hell you're going. This is a hospital, not a damn amusement park," malamig nitong sambit.

I froze, clutching my aching arm. I quickly hid it behind me and pinched it hard, like that would somehow cancel out the pain... or the embarrassment. Nurses passing by looked at me like I had bumped into him on purpose. Their stares felt heavier than the bruise on my

arm.

"I—I'm sorry, Doc," I stammered, barely able to meet his eyes.

He didn't say anything else. Just walked away like I was never even there. The worst part wasn't the scrape on my arm. It was the sting in my chest, the way his words echoed louder than the actual pain.

Putek, Solana. Ni maglakad ng diretso, 'di mo magawa. Ubus na nga ang dignity mo, sinira mo pa lalo.

I ate quietly at the fire exit stairs. Here, no judging eyes. The walls didn't care if I was just an intern with a low class doll shoesJust me, my cold rice and my noisy thoughts.

After lunch, we were told to report back to the university at 2 pm since tomorrow would be our first surgical assistance with Dr. Demirian. I remembered him again. I don't even do anything, but every time we cross paths, he always looks angry. Always. Like just breathing near him is a crime. I let out a heavy sigh.

"Good morning, everyone. How was your experience at Demirian Memorial Hospital? I've heard that you'll have your first surgical assistance tomorrow, with none other than the heirs of the Demirian Empire. You trained for this. There is no room for mistakes. Do you understand me?"

She spoke firmly, with authority, and we answered in unison.

"If there's a need for you to study and review the procedure for tomorrow's surgery, then do it. You may go now."

We politely exited her office. Simon and Ericka went straight to the library, robably to study. Meanwhile, I was still mentally calculating everything I needed to do today. I had food orders to deliver before I could even think about reviewing anything.

Pero, I couldn't help but feel nervous. Sure, I'm smart. I'm hardworking. But let's be honest, I can be a dumbass, too. If Dr. Demirian asks for a scalpel, I might just hand him a damn thermometer.

Grabe, Sol. Compose yourself. And I still need to finish my seniors assignments. Yeah, I do their papers and projects, for a price, of course. If they've got the money, I've got the answers. Supply and demand, bestie.

I can’t even begin to explain how exhausting my life is. There are no words for this kind of tired, entally, physically, emotionally. But I’ve gotten used to it. Since I left the orphanage, I’ve had no one but myself.

No family. No safety net. Just me, my dreams, and a hundred side hustles. I work like hell just to stay in school, because all I want is to graduate.

I want to be a doctor. I know I have the brain for it. But my pocket? Hell no. Even if I sold every organ in my body, it still wouldn't be enough for med school tuition.

That’s why I chose a course that’s still in the medical field. It’s not the dream, but it’s close enough. It’s the kind of choice you make when you’re smart, but not rich. When you dream big, but life tells you to be realistic.

And so, here I am. Working three jobs. Doing homework that isn't mine. Delivering food I can’t even afford to eat. Because at the end of the day, I may be tired, but I’m not giving up.

It was already 10 p.m. I was about to rest when someone knocked. It was Aling Krosana, the landlady.

"Aling Krosana, magbabayad ho ako sa katapusan, promise. Hindi po ako tatakas," inunahan ko na siya pagkabukas ko ng pinto.

Alam ko na kasi kung gaano kahaba ang sermon niya kapag natagalan pa.

"Aba’y siguraduhin mo lang, Solana. Ilang promises na ba ’yan?" sabi niya habang nakataas ang kilay.

Na-short lang naman talaga ako kasi nagbayad ako ng tuition ko last month. Hindi ko na idinagdag na wala na nga akong pang-ulam, baka lalo pa niya akong sermonan.

Pagkatapos niyang umalis, humiga agad ako sa kama. Wala na akong lakas para kumain. Okay na ’yon—nakabawas pa ako ng gastos kahit papaano.

Takte, kapalan ko na lang mukha ko bukas. Mag-a-advance ako sa restaurant na pinagtatrabahuhan ko malapit sa Demirian Hospital.

Bahala na. Kailangan ko kasi ng pera saka wala na rin akong pakialam

sa sasabihin ng iba. Ayoko na ring mag-ulam ng hangin.

CHAPTER 6

Carrying a big bag with some orders from the nurses, masaya ako, kasi kahit papaano, dumadami na rin ang umu-order sa paninda ko.

Masaya ako na nadagdagan ang gastos ko sa araw-araw na pakikipagsapalaran sa buhay.

I arrived at the hospital an hour early before my shift. Ayoko talagang ma-late, lalo na't ngayon ang first surgical assistance namin. Walking through the hospital, hindi pa rin ako makapaniwala. The place looked so luxurious, parang buong buhay yata akong hahanga rito.

Nilibot ko ang tingin sa aking paligid at ramdam ko ang kaginhawaan, lalo na masyadong maganda ang nakikita ko sa paligid. Hindi ko mapigilan na mapangiti sa aking nakikita at dahil dito ay gumagaan ang aking problema.

I politely greeted the guard and handed him his snack, an egg sandwich. Then I rushed to the elevator; Simon had just texted me to hurry since we need to review. I was massaging my shoulder where the bag had been hanging—ang sakit, mabigat kasi, ang daming umorder.

Pagkasakay ko sa elevator ay sumara na ito kaya nanatili akong nakatayo. Pero nagulat ako sa sunod na nangyari. Nanigas ako sa aking kinatatayuan at halos hindi makakurap ang mata.

I froze when the elevator doors slid open... and someone stepped in.

Dr. Demirian.

Behind him were his bodyguard and his secretary, both stiff and silent like shadows trained to blend into the background.

The air instantly grew heavier. I looked up, our eyes met.

Napalunok ako sa pagtama ng aming mga mata. Parang biglang tumahimik ang paligid ko at pakiramdam ko kami lamang ang tao sa elevator.

That look... That same look that makes me feel like I've committed a crime I can't remember doing.

Dr. Demirian.

His presence sucked all the air out of the tiny space.

I quickly shifted the bag of snacks behind me. He glanced at it for a second, and his jaw tightened. I felt very embarrassed, especially since I searched him yesterday. I know for a fact that I should be embarrassed, this man is a genius.

Saka nahihiya ako kapag nakikita ko na nakatingin siya sa mga paninda ko. Masyado kasing mataas ang tingin ko sa kaniya.

He graduated with flying colors, summa cum laude, top of his class, the kind of student na hindi lang basta matalino, kundi nakahihiya nang kabanggaan sa recitation.

He didn't just pass the medical boards. He aced them.

Then he went ahead and took the USMLE, PLAB, and AMC, lahat pasado, lahat first take. And after all the medals, the degrees, and the licenses, he still entered the military, served for six months in a medical unit abroad.

Some say it was voluntary. Others say it was his way of "toughening up."

Until now ay namamangha ako sa mga natapos niya. Wala man lang ako sa kalingkingan niya, kaya lubos akong nahihiya sa kaniya. Sa isip ko ay hindi kami puwede magtabi kasi langit siya habang lupa ako.

Hindi ko mapigilan na pagmasdan ang kaniyang porma.

He is wearing a dark blue polo underneath his perfectly ironed white coat. The fabric hugged his frame just enough to show the muscle in his arms, lean but strong. A stethoscope hung around his neck, the metal chest piece catching the light like it knew it belonged to someone important. On his wrist, a sleek black watch, simple, but expensive-looking. Probably waterproof, probably custom. The kind made for doctors who work sixteen-hour shifts without losing a second.

Everything about him screamed precision.

His posture was military-level straight. His hair neatly in place, like even the strands knew better than to disobey. And his eyes, cold, focused, sharp. You don't just get looked at by Dr. Demirian. You get

scanned, assessed, diagnosed, and filed in his brain under "avoidable distractions."

Ano na itong mga naiisip ko?

I couldn't help but notice the veins on his hand... thick, defined, almost aggressively visible.

Grabe. Araw-araw ba 'to nagbubuhat? O... araw-araw nagja-jakol? Get your brain out of the gutter Solana.

I mentally slapped myself dahil sa mga iniisip ko.

I hesitated, unsure whether to greet him or not, since I knew, for a fact, that he doesn't even like my existence. But I chose the latter.

"G-Good morning po, Doc."

I shut my eyes the moment it left my lips. My voice cracked, like a kid caught cheating on a quiz. Silence. A second stretched into what felt like minutes.

The elevator dinged. Gusto ko na lang magpakain ng lupa. Wala ba siyang balak na batiin ako pabalik?

I was about to rush out onto the floor, pretending the past 15 seconds didn't ruin my whole morning, when I heard it—

"Morning," he said with a low and casual voice.

Almost too casual, like it didn't just shake the entire hallway in my head.

I froze and I can't help but to I glanced back and smiled, wide and stupid, just to check if he actually said it.

But no...

He was already facing forward, arms crossed, phone pressed to his ear... eyes sharp like a hungry lion eyeing me. His secretary's eyes widened, parang siya pa 'yong nahiya para sa akin.

Turns out, he wasn't greeting me. He was greeting someone on the phone. I wanted to melt into the elevator floor right then and there. Gusto ko na lang ibalot sarili ko sa eco bag ng paninda ko. I hurried out of the elevator, clutching the strap of my bag, baka mahulog pa 'to, at ayaw ko na talagang dagdagan pa ang kahihiyan ko.

Lagi na lang ba kahihiyan ang nangyayari sa akin kapag nagkikita kami?

Binilisan ko ang pagtakbo para makalayo lamang sa lugar na ’yon. Wala na akong pakialam sa mga taong nakasasalubong ko.

’Pag nagkikita kami ni Doc, parang lahat na lang ng puwedeng ikakahiya ko ay nangyayari.

I was praying so hard as we walked through the emergency room. My hands were cold, my throat dry.

Today, we would assist Dr. Demirian and his surgical team during a craniotomy, a literal brain surgery. As soon as we entered the operating room, I spotted him immediately.

Dr. Malrick Virellus Valtar O. Demirian III.

Wearing his navy surgical scrubs, sterile gloves already on, surgical cap low on his forehead, and his signature specs perched on the bridge of his nose. He looked like the cover of a medical textbook, if medical textbooks could kill with just a glance.

He stood at the head of the table, arms folded as the anesthesiologist double-checked the patient's vitals.

"Prepped?" he asked, his voice low but firm as he glanced at the monitor.

The room fell quiet, the steady beeping of the heart monitor the only sound. A nurse handed him a pair of sterile gloves without a word. He slipped them on, eyes never leaving the patient.

"Vitals?" he added.

"Stable. Oxygen levels are holding," the anesthesiologist replied quickly.

"Begin."

One of the senior surgeons made a small mark on the patient’s scalp, just above the left temporal lobe. Dr. Demirian took the scalpel, made the initial incision with terrifying precision.

I held my breath as blood welled up from the skin. Still composed.

The sounds of the room changed, less voices now, more machines. The rhythmic beep of the heart monitor. The whirr of the cranial drill. He

didn’t even look up. He knew where every vein was, every risk, every angle.

The drill hummed against the skull as he carefully removed a small portion, placing the bone flap on the sterile tray beside him. Underneath, the dura mater, the thick membrane covering the brain, pulsed slightly, alive with every beat of the patient’s heart.

He paused and examined.

"We’ll remove the hematoma pressing against the motor cortex. Suction."

"Suarez, retractors," he said

That’s me and that’s my cue. I need to breathe. I moved closer, heart pounding in my ears louder than the beeping monitor.

He looked up, just for a second and .... I swear time stopped.

"Steady," kalmado niyang sabi pero may bahid na pagkalamig at diretso

Was he talking to me or to his hand? Either way, I nodded like a malfunctioning robot.

I passed him the retractor. He gave a brief nod before turning to Ericka and Simon.

"You two—hold steady," he ordered, his tone calm but commanding.

They moved into position without hesitation. Ericka adjusted the suction, keeping the area clear of blood, while Simon carefully steadied the head brace. Both of them handled it correctly and with ease, their movements sure and practiced. The moment the first incision began, I forgot everything else.

No hunger and no fear. Just the hum of machines, the faint classical music in the background, and the terrifying honor of watching a man’s brain slowly be exposed like it was the most delicate glass in the world.

Dr. Demirian worked with terrifying elegance. Every motion was surgical poetry.

Walang sayang.... Walang sobra. Parang sanay na sanay siyang iligtas ang buhay ng taong ’to, kahit hindi niya kilala. Panay isip ko sa

kaniya nang hindi ko namamalayan.

Then suddenly—

"Suarez, Scalpel."

I passed the wrong one. I handed him the forceps. The senior nurses froze, and Simon’s mouth dropped open so wide you could’ve tossed a full-size lechon in there.

Simon looked at the forceps then at me. Then at Dr. Demirian. And then, like he suddenly remembered he didn’t want to die today, he spun his head toward the heart monitor like it was the most fascinating thing in the universe.

Mukhang mapapagalitan ako dahil sa mali ang binigay ko. Kailangan ko na talaga mag-focus sa aking ginagawa.

CHAPTER 7

Dr. Demirian looked at the forceps like I had just offered him a spoonful of peanut butter mid-surgery. Then he looked at me, cold, sharp, like I was nothing but a speck of dust in his sterile OR.

I knew his jaw tightened again. The mask twitched, just a little, but enough to tell me I triggered something deep, dark, and furious.

"Sorry po, Doc," I whispered, grabbing the suction device as fast as I could and handing it over properly this time. My hands were shaking so bad I almost dropped it again. He took it without a word. Without even looking. Already focused on the patient like erasing my existence was the best way to save the day.

He continued like nothing had happened. But I knew. I knew. From the very start, I failed. I failed him. But I forced myself to stay. To focus. Because this wasn't just any surgeon. This was Dr. Malrick Demirian, a man who could probably suture a wound with his eyes closed while solving a calculus equation and criticizing your posture.

"Retractor," he said next. The instrument landed in his hand instantly, no hesitation. He worked swiftly, exposing the skull like it was second nature.

"Bone drill," he said. "Ten millimeters to the mass," the assisting surgeon reminded softly.

Dr. Demirian nodded, calm, precise. "No tremors. Let's save this man."

I stepped backward instinctively—but the senior nurse and assistant surgeon both glanced at me. Carefully. Like I was a bomb with a weak timer. I wanted to break. To cry.

What if I messed up again? What if Dr. Demirian used the wrong tool, because of me?

I shut my eyes tight. A tear escaped. Then another. I didn't move. I didn't wipe them away. Simon caught a glimpse. I knew he wanted to talk, to reach out, but he turned back to the operation. Duty first.

So I stayed at my post, silent. Watching. Absorbing. I don't even know how time passed. Parang lumulutang lang ako. All I knew—the surgery was successful.

Of course it was. Because it was Dr. Demirian.

Now we're at the hospital lobby. The OR tension replaced with the bitter warmth of cheap coffee. I sat between Erika and Simon, still shaken.

Simon leaned closer and whispered, "Solana... be honest. Gusto mo bang ipa-ban ang sarili mo sa medical field? Kasi parang 'yan ang mission mo today."

Erika slowly shook her head. "O di kaya, mag-shift ka na lang sa accounting. Please."

I let out a laugh, a tired and hopeless kind of laugh.

Tanginang buhay 'to.

Tatawagan ko nga si Mother Superior mamaya. Baka may novena silang pampakalma ng puso. After my shift at the hospital, I went straight to the restaurant. I work there as a waitress, night shift. Good thing naka-advance na rin ako. Mababayaran ko na si Aling Krosana.

But God, I was exhausted. My legs were trembling, my back ached, and my brain was still stuck on the forceps incident kanina. I could still feel Dr. Demirian's eyes judging me from ten feet away, like a ghost in scrubs.

12:50 a.m. I finally made it home. The streets were dark, but I was used to it. Sabi ko nga, palakasan na lang ng guardian angel. I stood outside my apartment for a moment, staring at the old metal door. Paint chipping. Rusted doorknob.

And then, just like that, a tear slipped down.

Pagod na ako.

I looked around the room: One single bed. Maliit na aparador. Maliit na mesa na may panis pang kanin .A cramped CR sa gilid, at may sink na parang malalagutan ng hininga.

And right there, sa gitna ng katahimikan ng gabi, I broke.

I was crying like a baby, loud and uncontrollable, not caring who heard me. Wala na akong pakialam kung marinig ako ni Aling Krosana. Bahala na siyang magreklamo bukas.

Tonight, I just needed to fall apart.

Nakatulugan ko ang pag-iyak kagabi. Mugto pa rin ang mata ko nang pumasok ako sa jeep. Tahimik lang ako. Walang energy makipagtitigan sa mundo. I wore a nude, fitted V-neck sweater, tag-ulan na kasi, at malamig sa loob ng hospital. Pa-professional, kahit ubos na ang loob ko. Black pants, as usual, at ang paborito kong black doll shoes, medyo pudpod na, pero laban pa rin.

Bitbit ko ang bag na punong-puno ng orders. Mabigat. Parang kasabay ng bigat sa dibdib. Kahit masama ang pakiramdam ko, hindi puwedeng hindi ako magbenta. Baka wala akong kainin sa susunod na linggo.

Simon told me immeidate as i arrived to the room where we intern satyed.

"Solana, Nurse Netjen told me pinatawag ka raw ni Dr. dermiran sa office nya"

I froze. I closed my eyes and sighed deeply. Ito na.

Hindi naman kasi biro yung ginawa ko. Mali ang naabot kong gamit during surgery, hindi lang kapalpakan, kundi pwedeng ikalaglag ng pasyente. I stepped out of the elevator.

"Dr. Demirian instructed you to wait inside." His secretary met me with a kind expression.

Nanlalamig ang kamay ko, hindi dahil sa aircon, kundi sa kaba. Yung tipong parang hinihintay mong ma-expel habang buhay. I sat on the sofa in front of his massive desk. Stiff. Parang kriminal na hinihintay ang sentensya.

Five minutes passed. The double oak doors swung open. And just like that, kumalat ang pabango niya sa buong office. He stepped in wearing a dark suit—sharp, clean lines. Maybe he came from a meeting. Maybe from court. Who knows.

But all I knew was:
This man smelled like judgment, expensive cologne, and three PhDs.

I immediately stood up the moment he sat down on his swivel chair, calm and towering like a judge about to read someone their final sentence.

He didn't even glance at me. He just pulled off his watch, placed it neatly on the table, leaned back slightly, and then—

"What the hell happened yesterday, Suarez?" It wasn't loud. But it hit like a slap—no, a blade. One clean, cold cut through my chest.

My breath caught. My vision blurred, not from tears, but from the sting in my chest.
A pain that came so fast, it made my heart stagger.

Thank you Janna @pisceanmyst. You made me happy sa tiktok reply mo. hekhekhek

Please vote and share Vesperians. Love ko kayo

CHAPTER 8

I didn't say a word. Kahit baliktarin ko pa ang mundo, mali pa rin ako, maling mali ang ginawa ko. I should have been more careful and focused.

Kahit gaano ko gustong ipaliwanag ang side ko, it wouldn't matter. Kasi sa paningin niya, I'm a mess. I already failed.

"I thought you are a consistent Dean's Lister," he said coldly, without even looking at me, he was busy singning something on a paper.

"A Dean's Lister student shouldn't act like that." He looked up and our eyes met, he spoke again..

" They should be intelligent yet mindful. Unfortunately, you don't have both Nurse Suarez" He wasn't yelling. He didn't need to. His silence was louder than any scream.

Napayuko ako agad. I couldn't look at him. Hindi dahil guilty ako, kundi dahil sobrang sakit pakinggan ng mga salitang 'yon galing sa kanya. My eyes started to blur, not because I was tired, but because of the tears forming slowly.

Then he said something that crushed me even more.

"Or maybe you're just not so focused because Nurse Kael is also in the OR. You should refrain yourself, separating lust from work."

His jaw tightened, and for a second, I thought he was going to explode. The veins on his neck were already threatening to pop out, I wasn't sure if he was angry at me... or at himself.

Parang may sumampal sa akin. Hindi lang basta salita 'yon. It was an accusation. A slap. A knife straight to my pride.

"D-Doc, with all due respect, Nurse Kael is my senior... I don't have any intent—"My voice cracked.

I swallowed hard, but the lump in my throat wouldn't go away. My hands were already shaking, and my chest felt tight, like my own body didn't even believe what I was saying. I wanted to finish my sentence, to defend myself, to explain my self ... but his eyes were already elsewhere. Cold. Unbothered. Like nothing I said mattered.

And in that moment, I knew.

He wasn't listening. He never was.

I stopped mid-sentence when he interrupted me, disrespectfully, like I wasn't even worth listening to.

"Exactly," he snapped. "He's your senior. You're just a mere intern. You should know how to set boundaries, not just randomly flirting early in the morning outside my hospital."

Napasinghap ako. What?

My chest tightened. My heart started to pound, not because of guilt but because of shock. He really thought that? He really believed I was... flirting? Tangina niya!

He didn't ask. He just judged.

"Doc..." I whispered, voice trembling. "Nagkakamali po kayo." But he didn't even flinch. His expression stayed cold, like he'd already decided who I was in his head.

And that hurt more than anything he said.

"D-Doktor Demirian," nanginginig ang boses ko habang pinipigilan ang hikbi, "naghahatid lang po a-ako ng order niya..." kahit mahirap mag salita pinilit ko parin.

"Nag t-tinda ho kasi ako pang tustos po sa pag-aaral ko" ani ko habang pilit pinipigilan ang luha ko.

Hindi ko na alam kung paano ko nasabi 'yon. Hindi na ako makapagsalita ng diretso. Sobrang sakit sa pakiramdam. Ang bigat sa dibdib. Para akong binaril ng sunod-sunod at wala akong bala para lumaban.

He scoffed, his brows drawn tight with disgust.

"And speaking of orders " he said, voice sharp and loud enough for everyone nearby to hear, "why the hell are you selling something in my hospital without any permission?"

Bumilis ang tibok ng puso ko.

"I pay my staff well. We have a cafeteria. My hospital isn't a place for cheap street goods and for the ninth time, be professional." Parang

binuhusan ako ng kumukulong tubig. ng lahat. Ramdam ko 'yung init, 'yung hapdi pero hindi sa balat. Sa loob. Sa puso. Sa pride ko.

"Good thing that you gave up wanting to be a doctor," tuloy pa niya, walang pakialam kung paano na ang itsura ko. "Because your morals cannot pass."

Para akong sinuntok sa kaluluwa.

Gusto kong magsalita. Gusto kong sigawan siya. Gusto kong ipaliwanag, ipagtanggol 'yung sarili ko. Pero wala. Wala akong lakas. Wala akong boses. Ang meron lang, luha. Tuloy-tuloy. Hindi na ako makahinga kaka kagat ng aking labi para pigilin ang hikbi.

Akala ko matibay na ako. Akala ko sanay na ako sa sakit. Pero iba siya. Iba 'yung sakit na dala niya.

At ang mas masakit pa... ni minsan, hindi ko siya binigyan ng dahilan para saktan ako ng ganito. I hid my arms and pinched them as hard as I could, hoping the sting would distract me from the bigger pain I was feeling, the humiliation.

Nakatungo pa rin ako. Hindi ko talaga kayang tumingin kahit kanino. Sobrang puno ng luha ang mukha ko, namumugto na ang mga mata ko. At sa dami ng tumatakbo sa isip ko, isang bagay pa ang biglang pumasok.

For the first time, pinagsisihan kong naka bob cut ako, alam Kong kahit nakayuko ako kitang kita ang mukha ko.

"M-masusunod po, D-Doc Demirian. P-puwede na ho ba akong umalis?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. Nakatungo pa rin ako, pero alam kong tinitingnan niya ako.

I waited. One minute... two minutes. Pero wala pa rin. Kaya ako na lang ang nagdesisyon.

"M-mauna na po ako, D-Doc. Salamat. I'm so sorry po ulit," bulong ko, halos pabulong lang talaga.

Wala pa rin siyang sagot, kaya Dahan Dahan akong tumalikod.

Thankfully, wala ang secretary niya sa labas ng pinto, kaya tuluy-tuloy ako sa hallway, deretso sa elevator. Pero habang naglalakad ako, pakiramdam ko parang hindi ako makahinga. Parang may mabigat na nakapatong sa dibdib ko, na unti-unting pinipisa ang loob ko.

Pagdating ko sa fire exit, hindi ko na kinaya.

Doon ako tuluyang humagulgol ng malakas. I clutched my chest as I cried so hard. Wala namang makarinig sa akin dito kaya okay lang.

Hindi ko alam kung anong nangyari. Basta nakatulog na lang ako ro'n kakaiyak, sa sahig ng fire exit, habang nakayakap sa sarili kong braso. Siguro sa sobrang pagod, hindi lang sa katawan, kundi sa isip, sa puso.

Pagmulat ko, mabilis kong hinanap ang phone ko at kinabahan ako agad. Nanginginig pa ang kamay ko habang chine-check ang oras.

3:02 PM.

Shit.

Bumungad agad ang text ni Simon.

"Solana, pinauwi tayo ng maaga ni Doc. Hinahanap ka nga Pero wala ka, asa ka ba? Iylng bag mo, binilin ko sa guard sa labas."

Edi bahala siyang magalit sa akin. Edi e-assign niya uli ako sa mens restroom.

Napapikit ako saglit. Sa wakas, parang nakikisama rin ang panahon. Paglabas na ako at, natanaw ko agad si Kuya Guard.

"Kuya..." mahina kong tawag, medyo nahihiya. "May iniwan po bang bag para kay Solana?"

Agad siyang tumayo nang maayos. "Ikaw si Solana?" tanong niya habang inaabot ang bag.

"Opo." mahinahon kong sabi

"Iniabot 'yan ni Nurse Simon kanina. Sabi niya, baka hanapin mo raw," sabi niya, sabay abot.

Kinuha ko ang bag nang maingat. Biglang bumigat ang dibdib ko. Hindi ko alam kung dahil sa pagod, o dahil sa pangalan ni Simon na binanggit niya.

"Salamat po, Kuya," mahina kong sabi, pilit na ngumiti.

"Ingat ka, iha. Parang uulan na," aniya, sabay tingin sa langit.

I let out a breath I didn't even know I was holding. Sa dami ng sunod-

sunod na sakit at hiya na tinanggap ko ngayong araw, kahit konting ginhawa lang, sapat na.

At least wala nang kailangan balikan sa OR. At least hindi ko na kailangang humarap pa sa mga titig ng tao.

At least... makakauwi na ako.

VOTING IS A BIG HELP FOR ME, PLEASE VOT AND SUPPORT PO.

Hello to Jessica Aranguiz. Your comment on my TikTok account made me happy po.

Love, Vesper

CHAPTER 9

Thankfully, hindi ako pinatawag sa University namin. Walang akong memo na natanggap, ni walang tawag. Deadm lang . Pero alam ko, ramdam ko, parang may mali.

For the past few days, hindi na ako isinasama ni Nurse Netjen sa OR. Ni hindi na niya ako pinapansin. Kung dati, kahit papaano may smile pa 'yan pag nagpapasa ako ng chart, ngayon parang hangin lang ako.

And today, I finally found out why. Habang nasa station ako, nilapitan ako ni Nurse Netjen. May hawak siyang clipboard, at 'yung usual niyang pilit na bait, wala.

"Solana, wala kang OR assignment ngayon," she said flatly while scanning the chart shes holding.

Napatingin ako sa kanya bigla.

"Ah. Saan po ako today Nude Netjen?" I asked, trying to sound as normal as possible kahit may kutob na ako, kahit kinakabahan na ako.

"Men's restroom. Marami raw ihi sa gilid ng urinal. Linisin mo." she said naturally, and even smile with other nurses passing by.

"Joke po ba 'yon?" Napatawa ako ng awkward.

"Nope," she replied. "That's Doctor Demirian's order. He said you're supposed to stay there for now. Kasi noon okay lang kahit mag kakamali ka." She said as she tapped my shoulder and walked away.

Para akong binagsakan ng isang toneladang kahihiyan. Hindi ako agad nakagalaw. Hindi ako agad nakapagsalita. Kasi ang sakit. Ang bigat.

Intern nurse ako, hindi Janitress. I work hard for this, halos sasabog na ang utak ko kakaaral and now I will end up cleaning and mopping the men's restroom? Nanlumo ako bigla.

'*Sabi ni Doc Demirian... doon ka muna.*' Napatango ako. Siguro doon nalang muna ako, wala namang problema sanay ako sa trabahong mapanghi.

I could feel the nurses' eyes behind me, I could feel the whispers, the smirks. They were talking about me. Judging me.

"O-Okay lang" Bulong ko sa aking sarili. My voice almost trembling. I turned away immediately. Ayokong makita ng kahit sino kung paano unti-unting namumuo yung luha sa mga mata ko.

Kaya hito ako ngayon. Mopping in the men's restroom. Hihinto lang ako at umiwas ng tingin kapag may papasok.

I've been cleaning the men's restroom for three days. With Mang Tasing, the janitor who always smells like efficascent oil at may baon na tinapay na nilagay lang sa bulsa. Mabait siya, tahimik at palangiti.

Wala pa rin akong assignment sa OR. Wala pa ring tawag mula kay Nurse Netjen. At higit sa lahat, wala pa ring kahit anino ni Doc Demirian. Dito na nga yata ako hanggang sa matapos ang internship ko.

But not until today.

Not until this very moment.

Tapos na ako maglinis ng restroom. Pawis na pawis, nangangati na din ang kamay ko sa chlorine na ginamit ko kasi may bara sa urinal kanina. Tangina, hindi ito trabaho ng nursing student pero sige.

I was just about to step out nang----

May bumangga sa akin.

"Tangina! " muntik na talaga akong dumulas sa basa pang sahig, but the man caught me. He held me by the waist—tight, firm, like he didn't even hesitate.

Then I heard the voice. That same cold voice.

"What the fuck are you doing here in the men's restroom, Nurse Suarez?"

Napalunok ako. I couldn't look up right away. Hindi dahil guilty ako, dahil nahihiya ako, amoy pawis at chlorine ako.

"D-Doc Demirian..." I said softly.

Napakagat ako sa labi habang nakatingin sa sahig. Nahawakan pa rin niya ako sa baywang, and for a split second, I wondered if he could feel how fast my heart was beating.

Napatikhim ako at mabilis naman niya akong binitiwan. Para siyang

napaso.

Then he stepped back, he took a deep breath and raised his thick eyebrows. Angrily. Judging.

Sakto namang may papasok na nurse sa restroom, pero nang makita si Doc na nakaharang sa pinto, nanlaki ang mata at dali-daling umatras, parang may nakita siyang multo.

"B-bakit ho ba kasi ako tinatanong ng gan'yan, kung kayo naman ho 'yung nag-assign sa'kin dito?" I whispered, as I barely breathing, napaiwas agad ako ng tingin ng maamoy ko ang mamahaling pabango niya.

Dead silence. His body stilled. He took a slow step forward.

And then, in a low, almost growling voice—

"What the fuck did you just say?" His voice sounds so lethal, almost inaudible, mas nakakatakot.

I swallowed hard. My voice was shaking, but I pushed the words out anyway.

"Nurse Netjen told me... na kayo po 'yung nag-assign sa'kin dito, Doc. I've been cleaning the men's room with Mang Tasing for three days."

"Assigned you? " he repeated, "What the hell are you talking about huh? " voice low, nearly inaudible.

I nodded slowly, still looking down. Kasi hindi ko kaya titigan siya habang sinasabi 'to.

"Three days na po. And I didn't complain," I added softly. "Ginawa ko po 'yung trabaho kasi akala ko tama lang 'yon... kasi nga po, intern lang ako."

"The fuck?" His voice dropped low, almost a growl, like the words were dragging across his throat.

His eyes bore into me. Sharp and Darin. For a second, I swore his hands were trembling and formed a fist, na parang pinipigilan Niya ang sarilig galit but he slipped them into his coat pocket, steadying himself.

He exhaled through his nose, jaw clenching. It was clear, he was trying hard not to explode. Then, without looking at me, he pulled out

the newest iPhone model, sleek, untouched, expensive and dialed with his thumb.

"Berto," he said flatly, not waiting for a hello. His secretary I thhik. "Solana will be there in ten. Let her wait inside my office. Understood?"

He said coldy as his eyes burned into me like I was the problem. Like I was the trigger. Like *me just standing there* was the last straw to his already fucked-up day.

"*Good.*"He said and nodded. Then he hung up, slid the phone back into his coat pocket with that same controlled movement, and finally *finally* looked at me.....with a pleading eyes?

"Don't...don't say anything," he muttered, this time softer. Not calmer. Just... *lower.*

"I'm already at my limit, and seeing you standing here... like that—" He cut himself off. His jaw clenched. He licked on his lower lip, hard, then looked away.

"Fuck!" He whispered, pero rinig ko naman.

"Just go to my office, Berto will accompany you there " he said. "Please, Sol"

I got stunned. Because... He called me Sol.....Solana.

Not *Suarez*. Not *Nurse Suarez*. Just—*Solana.*

And the way he said *please*?
Putangina. Parang hindi siya 'yon. Parang ibang tao 'yung nagsalita. Wala 'yung bangis. Wala 'yung lamig. May kaunting lambing.

Like for a second, just one goddamn second, he actually cared.

Tangina. Naka-lunok yata ng lamok si Doc.

I just stared at him, mouth slightly open.
He wasn't even looking at me anymore, nakatingin na sa sahig, as if he regretted saying it. As if na-realize niya na he let something slip.

I just nodded and turned around as my heart thudding in my chest, and walked.
Straight to the one place I didn't want to be....

With the one man who always saw the worst in me.

Author's Note
Hey loves! 🌙
If you enjoyed this chapter, please don't forget to **vote**, **comment**, and **share**. It might seem like a small thing, but it's already *huge* for me—and it truly encourages me to keep writing. 💌

Thank you for being here.
Love,
Vesper ✧

CHAPTER 10

I sat down on the soft leather sofa inside his office. Tahimik at napakalamig. Parang 'di ito opisina-parang interrogation room na may magandang furniture. The whole place looked like him. Cold. Authoritative.

I roamed around with my eyes, and one thing caught my attention-a massive framed quote in Latin na hindi ko maintindihan. But knowing him, it probably meant something like, *"Don't waste my fucking time, idiot."*

Dr. Demirian. Ang lalaking parang kayang pasabugin ang buong ospital sa isang tingin. Napailing na lang ako sa mga kalokohang nasaisip ko.

"Nurse Solana, milk tea n'yo po."

What? I blinked. Then blinked again.

Berto-Dr. Demirian's secretary-was suddenly right in front of me, holding a tall-ass cup of milk tea with whipped cream on top. I didn't even hear the door open. Kailan pa ito nandito? Tumagos ba siya sa dingding?

"P-po?" I stammered. "Milk tea?" tanong ko uli.

And suddenly, it made sense. Wala si Doc-kaya ngayon siya lumalapit. Pasekretong nagbibenta. Nako, itong si Berto talaga... nakalusot rin sa butas ng karayom si Doc.

"Yes po, Nurse Solana. Milk tea po," he confirmed with a proud grin, like he just handed me gold. I stared at the cup.

Alam kong mahal 'to. Mga ₱180? ₱200? I mean, sure, stressed ako, pero hindi pa naman ako millionaire. Nahihiya akong tumanggi kasi ang bait niya. At ang daming mata. Idagdag mo pa ang polo niyang halos sumakal na sa leeg niya.

"Ahm... magkano po ba 'yan, sir?" I asked softly, half-whisper. Baka may voice recorder dito at mabulilyaso pa itong small milk tea business niya ni Doc.

"Nako, hindi po!" Berto suddenly blurted, waving his hands like he'd

just committed a crime.

"Pinabibigay po ni Dr. Demirian 'yan. Matatagalan daw po kasi siya... may inaasikaso lang daw po saglit."

Tangina. So this was from... him?

Maybe he couldn't sleep. Maybe he felt bad. Maybe he didn't want to see me lose it again.
Or maybe he just wants me to shut up until he comes back. Tangina nya kong ganun!

Berto left the office politely, closing the door behind him with that awkward little smile to me. Tahimik ulit ang buong opisina. I was alone. With the milk tea.

I looked at it for a second, felt so unsure. Then took a sip. *Sweet.* I didn't even realize it... but my feet were swinging.

Never ako nagka-perang extra para dito. Lagi akong tubig lang, o kaya 'yung libreng kape sa station. But now? Here I was, inside the office of the man who gave me the worst week of my internship-

Then door suddenly creaked open behind me. I didn't have to look. I already knew.

Dr. Demirian-in his white polo na parang puputok na sa laki ng muscles niya sa braso. Napangiwi ako. Small size yata ang suot niya ngayon?

I eyed him as he walked past me- slow, calm, predatory. Like a lion in his territory.

He then eyed me like I was just something sitting in the middle of his den.
Then he sat down slowly, -on his swivel chair behind the desk. Crossed one leg over the other, leaned back, and finally looked at me.

"Are you fine here?" he asked hoarsely. Tangina. Bigla akong nabulunan sa milk tea.

Literal na nalunok ko yata 'yung pearl ng buo. I coughed so hard napaatras ako sa sofa, clutching my cup like it could save me from dying in front of the most intimidating man in this hospital.

I didn't even answer. I Couldn't. I was too busy trying to survive the

betrayal of a goddamn tapioca ball. And when I finally looked up- He was staring at me. Still calm. Still serious. Pero 'yung mata niya? Sharp. So focused on me.

But the corner of his lip? It twitched. *Putangina.* Like he was holding back a smile. Like he saw me choking to death and found it... funny?

"Sorry," I muttered, my voice raspy. "It's my first time... having milk tea. Thank po dito." I forced a smile at him. He blinked. Once. Then leaned back on his chair, folding his arms slowly.

"I noticed," he said with straight face. But his lips twitched again. And this time? I wasn't sure if I hated him less... Or so much more.

"'She's fired, by the way," he said suddenly. Like the word meant nothing. Like it was just another item on his to-do list.

Breathe. Walk. Fire someone.

"Ho?" I blinked. "F-fired?" He didn't even glance up. Still flipping through papers like he was reading a menu.

"I fired Nurse Netjen today," he repeated, calm as hell. "She assigned you to janitorial work without proper clearance. That's a violation. I don't tolerate that." I opened my mouth to respond, but nothing came out. I stared at him. Still so shocked.

"Don't get it wrong," he added, looking away again. "I didn't fire her because of you."

Nanliit ang mata ko, because the milk tea in my hand said otherwise.

I fell silent for a few minutes. I didn't know what to say. Everything hadn't sunk in yet, so I just cleared my throat to break the awkwardness.

I was about to sip my milk tea again-Trying to act normal. Trying to pretend I wasn't still spinning inside-When he spoke.

"It's twelve already," he said quietly. "Have you eaten your lunch?"

My hand froze mid-air, the straw just inches from my lips. Tangina.

That again. That voice. Not cold. Not sharp. Just... *soft.* I looked at him slowly, like I wasn't sure he was real.

"Po?" He glanced up from the folder and met my eyes this time.

"I said, have you eaten?" His eyebrows drew together in the middle.

"Ah... hindi pa ho, Doc" I tried to laugh-awkwardly, kahit konti. "Pero okay lang po, may pearls naman 'tong milk tea. Sapat na." His jaw tightened, and he pinched the bridge of his nose-like I was some kind of problem.

He pulled out his phone and dialed someone, and of course. It was the latest model iPhone. Yung tipong kahit isang kaluluwa ko iluwa ko, hindi ko pa rin kayang bilhin

"Berto," he said sharply. "Tell Erickson to buy lunch. For two."
Then hung up. Just like that.

"D-doc..." I said softly, my voice sounds unsure. "Hindi na ho kailangan - I mean, may baon ho ako sa bag." ani ko at hilaw na napangiti.

I had *Skyflakes.* Two pieces. Crushed pa iyon. And one ketchup packet I forgot to throw. Nagtitipid kasi ako ni hindi ko nga alam kung aabot pa 'yung allowance ko hanggang Sabado.

"You said you haven't eaten," he interrupted, eyeing me through my soul.

Short. Final. Dismissive. After three minutes, the door opened again.

Berto stepped inside-this time, carrying a huge paper bag with thick handles, And printed in gold letters?

La Marée, gago? Hindi ko yata kayang kainin yan.

"Doc," Berto said, placing the bag gently on the coffee table like it was sacred. "Here's your order. Good for two."

I stared at it. Then at him. Then back at the bag.

"Thank you, Berto. You may leave," Doc said simply.

"Yes po, Doc."Berto nodded fast, eyes not even meeting mine. Nakayuko lang ito at nag lakad palabas.

The door clicked shut. He stood up without a word.

He walked towards the long table near the glass wall. The one with the full view of the entire city. He placed the paper bag down carefully, opened each container like it was a lab experiment, and

started arranging the food.

Yes. **Dr. Malrick Demirian**, surgeon extraordinaire, God of terror, destroyer of interns... was now plating *truffle pasta* like a maître d'.
I just sat there, stunned. Watching him unfold napkins. He even placed the bottled sparkling water beside the plate. With intention.

He glanced at me once. "You're not eating there," he said flatly.

I blinked. "Po?" He pointed at the table by the glass wall. "You'll eat here. Not on the couch like a sad person."

"W-wala naman po akong-hindi ko po alam kung paano kumain ng ganito-" My voice cracked halfway. Embarrassed

"I'll teach you how to use a fork if necessary," he muttered, turning his back again.

Tangina talaga. May sarcasm pa rin, kahit sweet.

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Thank you for being here.
Love,
Vesper ✧

CHAPTER 11

"How is it?" he's finally talking, not barking orders, not throwing insults, but actually having a conversation.

"Po?" My eyes widened like he just asked me to perform brain surgery.

"Why do I always shock you? What exactly is running inside that pretty head of yours?" He raised a brow. "I was just asking how the pasta and steak are," he added, coolly.

My mouth dropped a little.. That's the longest sentence he's said to me. Ever.

He kept slicing the steak with surgeon-level precision, then, without looking up, transferred another cut onto my plate.

Ako lang yata ang pinapakain nito

"Uh... masarap po, Doc," I managed, blinking rapidly. "First time ko 'to." My voice cracked a bit, but I smiled. Couldn't help it.

"Hmm. I see." He hummed, low in his throat. Then he leaned slightly forward, rested his elbow on the table, and clasped his fingers together like he was about to conduct an interrogation.

"What do you usually eat, then?"

The way he asked calm, curious, not judging—

"Uh... mga itlog maalat na may kamatis, pancit canton na may itlog, de-lata na may itlog," I answered while chewing the steak slowly. I glanced out the glass wall. The city looked unreal from here, so far, so quiet.

He paused, obviously confused. Napahagikhik ako sa isip ko— Parang first time niya sa mundo ng kanto food, e.

"Why does everything have to be paired with egg?" He looked at me, brows slightly raised. "And those aren't healthy, Solana."

Solana
From his mouth. Ba't ang sarap pakinggan? Pero 'pag si Tonyok, anak ni Aling Bebang, ang nagsabi nun, para akong tinawag ng taong kanal

sa tabi ng tricycle terminal.

"Hindi naman," I shot back, eyes narrowing playfully. "Hindi pa nga ako nagkasakit ni minsan."

"Maybe that's why you look so shiny," he muttered, cutting another piece of steak.

"You should eat lunch with me more often. So we can eat real food." He looked away fast, pretending to be way too interested in the sparkling water like it was suddenly the most complex object in the room.

Ayoko ng iniisip ko ngayon. Ayoko ng *feeling* ko ngayon. Ayoko ng possibility na...

...baka hindi lang siya nakokonsensya.

After we ate, he stood up, took a napkin, and wiped his lips. I blinked, stared for half a second, then awkwardly copied him. Tangina. Ni hindi nga ako naggaganito sa apartment. Minsan nga, nakakalimutan ko pang magsipilyo after kumain.

I cleared my throat, placed the used tissue neatly on the tray like I was in a five-star etiquette class. He didn't say anything.

I thought he was heading back to his desk, back to paperwork, to being cold and distant again. So I stood too and stepped outside. I even smiled at Berto when I passed. He smiled back... but it wasn't just any smile. It was teasing. Like he knew something I didn't.

But then his smile dropped. Fast. His eyes shifted behind me.

"Berto," Doc said firmly, voice back to steel. "Tell everyone in the meeting I'll be late."

Berto blinked. "Y-yes, Doc."

And before I could even turn fully, his hand was on my back. Light. Steady.

"Let's go." I stiffened.

Akala ko may pupuntahan siya. Akala ko may ipapagawa pa. Akala ko baka may emergency, or may iiwan siyang bagong sampal ng salita.

Pero nagkamali ako. Pagdating namin sa **double doors** kung saan naka-tape pa 'yung papel na "INTERN ROOM – doon siya tumigil. Tumingin sa akin. Calm. Composed. Walang bahid ng kung ano.

"See you tomorrow, Solana," he said. Then he turned around. Just like that.

Wait, what? Did he just... drop me off? I stood there, stunned. Naka-nganga.

Two weeks had passed. Smooth. Too smooth.

No humiliation. No surprise steak lunches. No forehead veins popping from Doc.
Peaceful, they say. just like today

One morning, while I was reviewing charts at the nurse station, he passed by.

"Good morning," he said. Simple. Two words,The air shifted. Even the thermometer probably dropped two degrees. Every nurse within a five-meter radius turned.

Some stared at him. Most stared at *me.*

Simon, of course, didn't waste time. His eyes narrowed. Slowly. Suspiciously. Judging me like a telenovela villain.

"Ano?" I snapped at him, defensive agad.

"I wasn't born yesterday, Solana." He didn't blink. Just crossed his arms.

"Bumati lang siya, Simon! Bawal na bang bumati ngayon?!" He just smirked like he knew something I didn't. And honestly? That pissed me off even more. My ears burned.

So I clocked out, grabbed my tote, and rushed to the restaurant beside the hospital—my second shift, my survival hustle. I hurriedly walked into the restaurant beside the hospital, tied my apron, and clocked in for my second shift.

Akala ko, okay na. I grabbed the tray and headed toward my assigned table—but the moment I stepped closer, I felt it.

Eyes. Not just any eyes.His.

"G-good evening po, welcome to Le Ravelle Prime—M-May I take your order, sir?" He didn't speak at first. He just stared. Then leaned back on the seat, crossed his arms—veins and muscles flexing like he was in a gym shoot—and raised a single brow.

"Why the hell are you still working?"His voice low, sharp. "It's already eleven. In a damn fucking night." I stiffened.

The restaurant had rules. No personal questions. No private conversations. So I swallowed down the lump in my throat and forced a neutral smile.

"I'm sorry, but... may I take your order now?" His jaw clenched.

His nostrils flared. He didn't like that answer. Then, slowly, he raised his hand. like a king summoning his knights.

Our manager appeared in seconds.

"Hi, Mr. Demirian!" she greeted, half-bowing. "It's our pleasure to have you here again. It's been a while."

"Yeah. Just got busy." he said it like it was nothing
"May I ask if I can speak to her for a moment?" His tone didn't soften.

Tangina.
Anong nakain niya?

"Did she... do something unpleasant to you, sir? If yes, I can report—" She cleared my throat. When his eyes darken His eyes darkened, like he didn't like the question at all.

"I mean—yes, Mr. Demirian. Not a problem at all." Our manager coughed awkwardly and nodded fast. Then she walked away. Fast. Quiet. Like she was escaping a crime scene.

He directed his eyes to the chair in front of him, signaling me to sit.

"What... do you want to ask, Doc?" I said, barely above a whisper.

He didn't answer. Not yet. He just looked at me.

Like I was something reckless.
Like I was something fragile.
Like I was something his.

Hello there, Augustaurelia!

Thank you *so much* for commenting—and for patiently waiting for my story! 💖 Your support means the world to me. I hope you stay with me 'til the end!

Author's Note

Hey loves! 🌙

If you enjoyed this chapter, please don't forget to **vote**, **comment**, and **share**. It might seem like a small thing, but it means *so much* to me—it truly keeps me inspired to write more. 📝

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Love always,
Vesper ✨

CHAPTER 12

"Why the hell are you still working here?" I lowered my head instantly

His voice wasn't loud . It cut through the restaurant.

Sharp. Controlled. Dangerous. I could already feel it, *the eyes*. The other customers were watching. Of course they were.

 Because I wasn't just sitting beside some random table. I was sitting with Dr. Malrick Demirian. The man who owns wings of hospitals. The heir to the Demirian empire.

I was wearing an apron that didn't fit, holding a pen that barely worked. I clutched the menu tighter, heart pounding so loud it echoed in my skull.

"I-I'm working—"

"I fucking know, Solana. Don't state the obvious." His voice was low. Sharp. But not cruel.

I blinked. There it was. The truth. Nothing fancy. Nothing dramatic. Just reality.

He stared at me. There was something in his eyes. Hindi ko mawari. But whatever it was, it made the air between us heavier.

He didn't yell. Didn't speak again. He just sighed. Closed his eyes for half a second. Then raised a hand and massaged the bridge of his nose.

Slow. Controlled.
Like he was holding something back.

My shift ended smoothly, It was one of the busiest nights in the restaurant.

I was drenched in sweat, my shoulders were screaming, and I was one tray away from snapping at a customer for breathing too loud. I just wanted to go home. Sleep.

I stood by the roadside, massaging my shoulder with one hand and holding my plastic-wrapped tips in the other. Waiting for a jeep.

Then a car stopped in front of me. A black Aston Martin stopped in front of me.

I stepped aside. Siguro may hinihintay.

But the car moved forward. Sinundan ako.

I stopped walking.

The door opened. And there he was.

Dr. Malrick Virreluz Fucking Demirian.

Standing like he owned the entire street. Arms folded. Eyes sharp. His signature death-stare was on full display—

"Get in, Solana. Now."

I blinked at him, my brain still catching up. May kasalanan na naman ba ako? the end-of-shift patient report?

"D-Doc... pwede bang... ipagpabukas na lang?" I stammered. "I mean, may trabaho pa 'ko bukas and—"

"What the hell are you saying?" His voice dropped

You can come in willingly, or I'll make it happen my way and trust me, you won't like my way" My mouth went dry. I looked around. The street was empty. No backup. No witnesses.

Just me. Agad akong pumasok. Kasi alam kong hindi siya nagbibiro. Hindi ito yung tipo ng lalaking magsasayang ng salita.

"Seatbelt," he said, his voice low but firm, almost like a warning, not a suggestion.

Leather agad ang sumalubong sa akin. Maaliwalas, malinis. Ang ilaw sa loob ng sasakyan ay dimmed lang, pero sapat para makita ang details ng interior—black leather seats, silver linings sa dashboard, Blue lights, expensive tech I couldn't even name. and a faint scent of expensive cologne mixed with mint.

Elegant. Masculine. Exactly like him.

His watch gleamed under the light. His hand rested on the wheel, veins visible, flexing every time he adjusted it. He drives smoothly. Like a man who controls things for a living.

"Your shift ends at 12:30," he asked, barely glancing at me before looking back to the road.

"Uh... yes ho, Doc." I stared outside, trying not to be obvious. The city lights blurred like a painting I couldn't afford to touch.

"And you only commute? Taxi?" I almost laughed.

"Mahal ho 'yon, Doc. Nag-jeep lang po ako." Kung malakas lang 'yung potpot, baka nga nag-potpot na lang ako, para mas makatipid.

"Damn... I should've taken you home if I'd known." He sighed heavily.

Parang nahihirapan siya huminga—pero hindi dahil sa pagod. Dahil sa inipon niyang inis.

"Where do you live?"

"Sa Alabang lang, Doc." I answered quickly, almost too quickly.

Then his grip on the steering wheel tightened. Lumabas 'yung ugat sa kamay niya.

"The fuck? That's thirty minutes from here." I just nodded.

I closed my eyes, not because I was sleepy, but because my heart was thumping so hard it felt like it would break my ribs. He didn't speak after that. Maybe he thought I was already asleep.

Fifteen minutes later, I opened my eyes.

"d'yan na lang ako sa may poste." He didn't reply. Just turned the wheel sharply, still smooth, still calculated.

"Where's your house?" he asked, eyes scanning the shadows like he was expecting a criminal to jump out.

"Papasok pa po ako d'yan. Lakad lang ng three minutes, Doc." He frowned. Deeply. Like the idea of me walking in the dark physically offended him.

"I'll take you home. It's too dark. No buts. Let's go." Of course. That's Dr. Demirian. You don't say no to him.

Naglakad kami sa masulok na daan. He examined it like it was some kind of contagious disease.

We stopped right in front of my apartment. I reached for the door handle, thinking he'd drive off now. But he didn't.

Instead, he looked at my building, quiet, unreadable. The paint was chipping. A dog barked in the distance. Buti na lang hatinggabi na. Wala 'yung mga kapitbahay kong chismosa, kung hindi, fiesta ako bukas. I tried to smile, kahit awkward.

"Okay na po ba?" I asked, opening the door to my apartment, keys in hand.

As if he couldn't understand how I lived like this.

As if something inside him, some part that cared, was losing a battle he didn't even want to admit he was fighting.

"Baka kasi pagbalik mo... wala nang gulong 'yung sasakyan mo," I muttered, gesturing to the sketchy street. "Okay na ako dito, Doc."

"Erickson is everywhere. Don't worry much." He didn't even flinch.

Erickson? Oh right. His bodyguard. Of course. What else would you expect from the heir of the Demirian empire? A personal bodyguard named Erickson, probably ex-military, who can make a sniper vanish in broad daylight.

"Give me your phone." I blinked at him, hesitating . Alam kong masusugatan na naman ang pride niya kapag nag-react ako, kaya...

So I pulled out my phone from my pocket. My sturdy, battle-tested Nokia.
Mas matibay pa sa feelings ko sa sarili ko. I handed it to him like I was giving him a fragile artifact from another era.

He frowned.

Literally stared at it. Tilted it a bit. Like he was trying to figure out how it still existed in 2025. But he took it anyway and started typing something.

Probably saving his number? Or tracking me? Or summoning Erickson from a satellite?

Then the ringtone exploded in my quiet apartment. Like a gunshot.

"FUCK!" he jumped and almost dropped the damn thing. His hand twitched like he'd been tased.

"What the hell was that? Did I do something?!" he barked, glaring at the phone like it personally offended his entire bloodline.

I scrambled to take it back.

"Uh... lowbat ho, Doc," I said, smiling awkwardly. "Sensitive na siya minsan kapag gutom na." I smiled nervously.

He looked at me. Looked at the phone.
Back to me.

"Tsk." He clicked his tongue and, handed me his phone.

Not just any phone. Its an iPhone 16.Black. Matte finish. Heavy. Probably smarter than me.

"Give me your number," he said, voice low. Casual. But his eyes? Suddenly *not* on me.
He was now weirdly focused on the sink behind me.
Like he spotted a new strain of bacteria on the faucet.

"...So I can ask for an... update," he added, almost too quickly.

Update?

On what? My love life? My electricity bill? My cholesterol? My daily medical report? I swallowed hard, nodding like a robot short-circuiting in real time.

"O-okay," I stuttered. My hands were shaking a bit as I typed in my number.

I made sure to wipe my thumb before touching the screen I gave it back to him without looking up.

He took it without a word. I swear... for a second... our fingers touched.

And it felt like touching a live wire.

Not the electric kind.

The dangerous kind.

Author's Note

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If you enjoyed this chapter, please don't forget to **vote**, **comment**, and **share**. It might seem like a small thing, but it means *so much* to me—it truly keeps me inspired to write more. 💌

Thank you for being here.
Love always,
Vesper ✨

CHAPTER 13

I was about to sleep when my phone rang.

Unknown number:
I'm home.

Parang limang minuto pa lang siyang umalis. Lumipad ba siya? But I didn't reply. Wala akong load. Tsaka kampante naman akong nakarating siya.

I was drifting off, finally, when it rang again.

This time, it was a call. The screen glowed in the dark room, but my body was already giving up.
I didn't answer.

The next morning I just threw on a plain white shirt and those nude trousers I bought last year sa tiangge. Finger-combed my bob-cut hair, no time, no budget. Then I left to catch a jeep.

"Uy, Solana," sabi ni Boning, 'yung konduktor na palagi kong nasasakyan. "Iba yata ganda natin ngayon."

"Wala akong pera, Boning. Tsaka na pag nurse na talaga ako," I joked.

Tumawa si Manong Eddie, jeepney driver. Pagbaba ko, I handed over my crumpled twenty peso bill. I checked my wallet. Tangina. Sakto pa lang sa sunod na linggo 'yung laman.

Naalala ko, may part-time daw 'yung apo ni Aling Krosana sa Sabado. Subukan ko nga 'yon. Kahit extra pang-load lang.

I was deep in thought while walking toward the hospital entrance. When I heard a voice.

Low. Smooth. Familiar.

"Get in the car, Solana. It's so damn hot."

I froze.

There he was. Dr. Malrick Virreluz Valtar Demirian.

One arm casually holding the steering wheel. The other resting on the open window, his silver watch gleaming like it was posing for a magazine shoot.

Iba na naman ang suot niya. Silver watch today. Yesterday, black. May collection ba siya?
Of course. Barya lang sa kanya 'yon.

"B-bakit... andito ka?" I asked, trying to sound alive. He didn't answer. Just opened the door from inside with a sharp click. Like he expected me to get in. Like this was normal.

"Doc, Salamat po pero malapit na lang naman ako."
I even smiled—full white teeth and all. Trying to be polite. Trying to escape.

"Erickson, drive my car to the parking lot." Then he got out.

And for a second, I forgot how to breathe.

Black polo. White coat. Gray pants. Black leather shoes.
This man, No wonder girls fall over themselves for him.

He looked like a walking Calvin Klein billboard. With a license

"D-Doc, hindi na po—" I tried again, nervous.

He cut me off.

"Let's go, Solana." Final. Dismissive. No buts.

I bowed my head slightly. Lahat ay nakatingin. Of course—they were. I was walking beside a Demirian.

Cold stares. Whispers. Curiosity.

The guard greeted him. Nurses smiled. He didn't look at anyone. Didn't nod. Didn't blink.

So cold. So distant. So fucking him.

As we walked into the lobby, I spotted Simon. Standing there like he was waiting for someone—maybe Ericka? But when his eyes landed on us, me and Doc, side by side—

Nanlaki mata niya. I gave him a nervous smile. One that said, *"Don't. Ask. Please."*

"You didn't reply to my text," he said as the elevator doors closed. "...Nor answer my calls."

Shit. He was standing so close, but not too close. Just enough to remind me I am small. I glanced at our reflection on the elevator walls. He was so damn tall. Hanggang balikat lang ako.

His eyes said I just committed a deadly sin. I panicked under his stare, eyes suddenly focused on the white floor of the elevator.

"Wala kasi akong load, Doc," I mumbled. "Tsaka... nakatulog na po ako kagabi." I bowed a little— because I genuinely couldn't carry his gaze.

"I will give you a monthly load"

My eyes widened.

"Po?" I blinked fast. "Nako, hindi na ho kailangan, Doc—"

"It's for work purposes, Solana," he cut in smoothly. "Nothing more. Daily reports, perhaps." Perhaps? Since when does Dr. Demirian sound... unsure?

He walked me to my station before heading back to the elevator to go up to his office.
The air left with him. As soon as the elevator closed, I turned around. All the nurses at my station were *staring at me*.

Intensely. Like I just kissed a senator. Or inherited a secret will.

Lunchtime came before I even realized it. I didn't think twice. I headed straight outside. And when I say *outside*, I don't mean the cafeteria. I mean the fishball stall. That would be my lunch.

I was happily eating, fishball stick halfway to my mouth, when someone behind me cleared their throat. I almost dropped my food. Tangina naman

I turned.

"Erickson?" I blinked. I smiled "Mahilig ka rin pala sa fishball? Di bagay sa vibe mong full-black suit at earpiece."

"Hindi ho, ma'am," he said, deadpan.

"Pinahanap po kayo ni Dr. Demirian." Napahinto ako. Pinahanap? Bakit? Anong kasalanan ko na naman?! I mentally scanned everything

I did since morning.Wala naman akong nakalimutang i-report. Hindi rin ako late.

But I decided to follow Erickson anyway. Just in case. Baka na-complain ako ng bagong head nurse.

"Galit po ba si Doc?" I asked without thinking.

"Opo, ma'am. Kanina pa po kayo hinahanap." Napasinghap ako.

We were just a few steps away from the hospital entrance when I saw him.

Dr. Malrick Virrelus Valtar Demirian.

Hands on his waist. Brows drawn. Jaw clenched. Like a boss about to fire someone.

People are watching him. Because how could they not? White coat pushed back slightly from his arms, veins on display. Black polo hugging his chest perfectly. Gray slacks fitted like sin.

Straight ahead.
Waiting.
For me.

Putangina, Solana. I felt my legs lock up.

I walked toward him like a kid being summoned to the principal's office.

My fingers clutched the warm cup of fishball like it could save me from the wrath of the Demirians.

"I—I'm sorry po, Doc—" ready to explain, until he cut me off.

"Let's go," he said. No further words.

Just placed his palm firmly on my lower back and started guiding me forward.

All the nurses turned to stone.
The radiologists stopped mid-convo.
One anesthesiologist dropped her pen.
Every single female within the hallway witnessed it, his hand on me.
Walking me in. Like I was someone.

Or worse, like I was his.

I felt their eyes drilling holes in my skull. And still, he didn't move his hand.

Author's Note
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Thank you for being here.
With love,
Vesper ✨

CHAPTER 14

We reached his office. His throne. The kingdom of Malrick Demirian. He sat down smoothly on that expensive-looking swivel chair like he was born on it and closed his laptop with one hand.

Then turned his full attention to me.

"Where have you been?" he asked, calm. Too calm.

"Uh... sa labas lang po ng hospital, Doc. Kumakain po ng fishball."

He eyed the cup in my hands like it personally offended him.

"Obviously."

I looked down.

"May... may report po ba akong nakaligtaan?" I asked, my voice trembling. "Sa daily medical report ho ba or—"

"No." He leaned back. Relaxed, but not really. Still staring. Still unreadable.

"It's all good, Solana," he said.

Then paused.

"Let's eat lunch now." Nabato ako sa kinatatayuan ko.

Right there on the spot, eyes fixed on the damn paper bag sa mesa niya. Logo pa lang, parang gusto ko nang umiwas. Walang laban ang ipon ko d'yan.

"I mean *real* food, Solana. That's not even food. Come on." He raised a brow Wala na akong nagawa. I pulled the chair quietly and sat across him.

I picked at the pasta in front of me while he ate in silence, every movement smooth, demure.

"La Merith University, right?" Napatingin ako sa kanya, confused.

"Po?"

He finally met my eyes.

"You study at La Merith University."

"Sa inyo po 'yun, Doc," I added with an awkward smile

"It's my grandpa's." He didn't blink

"Doc... saan po kayo nag-aral ng medicine?" I bravely asked.

He paused. Napkin to his lips. Demure, elegant, annoyingly graceful.

"Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons" He said it like it was nothing. Like he didn't just drop the name of one of the most expensive, most elite, most out-of-my-league schools on the planet.

"And you graduated with honors, right?" I asked before my brain could stop my mouth.

He rested his elbow on the table, clasped his hands, and tilted his head like he was about to interrogate me.

"Did you do a background search on me,Solana?" He smirked.

"N-no po. Narinig ko lang sa mga nurse," I muttered. He didn't respond right away. He just watched me. Like I was something interesting.

"Uhuh," he said like he didn't believe me.His lips twitched.

"T-Totoo. Always ka pinag-uusapan doon. Hindi ako ang nag-search," I replied, Defensive. Slightly offended.

His brows raised a little, impressed. Amused. Like he didn't expect me to push back. Then, he leaned back slowly on his chair. Napaka chill. Napaka composed.

"Well... you don't have to search me though. You can just ask me. Personally." The way he said it. Low. Smooth. With the smallest hint of a smirk.

I froze. Tangina. Is he flirting?

I should not blush. No, Solana. You can't. This is just lunch. This is *just lunch.*

"Uh..." I don't even know what I'm trying to say. My throat went dry.

My brain left the room.

And then it happened.

His laugh. That low, full, damn-near-illegal laugh echoed across the office, bouncing off the glass, the shelves. It filled the whole room.

My mouth dropped.

That was the first time I ever heard him laugh.
Malrick Demirian. The coldest, most terrifying man in this hospital.

He wiped the corner of his lips with a napkin, still amused, still smiling.
I almost wanted to record the moment. Proof that he was human after all.

But then—

My phone buzzed against the table. I jumped a little.

I looked down. And read the text.

Simon.

Solana, we were being called in the University at 1PM. May meeting.

Putangina. 12:30 na. My eyes widened as the panic kicked in. I didn't even have time to reply. Wala akong load. Wala akong excuse.

I stood up abruptly.

"D-Doc, salamat po sa lunch, but I have to—"

"Something urgent?" He looked up, calm. Too calm.

"Yes po. Meeting sa University. 1PM sharp." I was already fumbling with my phone, with my bag, grabbing everything I could like a damn hurricane just hit me.

I was already fumbling with my phone, with my bag, grabbing everything I could like a damn hurricane just hit me.

"I'm really sorry po, ang sarap ng—ng pagkain. "

" That's probably about the medical mission that grandpa proposed" he said, casually tapping his fingers on the table.

" S-siguro , mauna napo ako doc , salamat sa lunch , salamat po" I hurried went out and waited the elevator.

My fingers mashed the elevator button repeatedly like it would make the damn thing come faster.

"Berto, cancel my meeting at 2 PM," I heard him say through the door. "I have something important to do."

"Acknowledge, Doc," Berto replied, voice polite but curious.

Let me rephrase. Storming towards me.
In full black polo, gray slacks, with his coat billowing like some high-budget commercial.

"Let's go, Solana."

"Ha?"Ihahatid niya ako?I blinked.

"N-nako Doc, 'wag na po. Kaya ko na po—"

"I'm invited to that meeting, Solana," he cut in, slipping his phone in his pocket. "Let me give you a ride."

I opened my mouth again, ready to refuse—

"Come on. We're gonna be late."My brain short-circuited.

I am there in the passenger seat. Clutching my bag. Bowing my head. Because tangina, my shoes didn't match the car. My outfit screamed Divisoria. And here I was, beside the heir of the Demirian empire—riding shotgun like I belonged.

I didn't.

But he made it feel like... maybe, somehow, I did.

I quickly got out of the car as soon as it stopped. I walked fast—almost running—just to put space between us. People were staring. Heads turned. Whispers followed us like a wave.

"Why the hell are you almost running, Solana?" his deep voice called out behind me—low, and just a little irritated.

I didn't answer. Bahala ka diyan. Kung ma-bash ako ng buong

University, kasalanan mo 'to. Kahit nauna ako ng konti, dahil sa haba ng biyas niya, sabay pa rin kami dumating.

I finally reached the conference room. The doors were still open. I peeked in—
Damn. They were about to start.

And then—

Click.

He entered the room. Heads turned. Eyes widened. Tangina.

I awkwardly bowed my head, smile slighty. But the man behind me, with all the confidence in the world, broke the silence.

"Good morning, everyone. Is there any vacant seat?" Gusto kong himatayin.

People's eyes bounced from me to him.

"D-Doc Demirian," Mrs. Dela Paz, the school president, blinked like she'd just seen a rare gemstone.
"I thought you couldn't come. It's truly our pleasure to have you here. Yes, we still have a seat—" She approached us,

I stepped back. Tama siya, wala na talagang upuan. Puno na. Siguro pupunta na lang ako sa pinakalikod. But before I could move far—

"Hi, Doc," a voice called sweetly, too sweet. "I'm Dra. Pauline. Remember? From St. Luke's Hospital?"

I turned. And there she is.

Dra. Pauline.

Tall. Confident. Chin held high like the hospital was her runway. She wore a fitted white polo, buttoned just enough to look professional, but low enough for everyone to see her generous chest threatening to pop out with every breath.

She paired it with a tight black pencil skirt that hugged her small waist perfectly, and black high heels that clicked against the floor with every step,

Her red lips curled into a perfect smile. She extended her manicured hand to Doc Demirian like they shared some secret.

Doc looked at her. Nodded. Polite. Neutral.
"Of course. Long time."

I gulped. Tangina! Small waist lang yata ang meron ako. Wala akong red lipstick. Wala akong branded na heels. Heck, wala nga akong matinong baon.

I just sighed heavily. Parang may nakabara sa dibdib ko. Hindi siya sipon. Hindi rin ubo. Pero ang bigat. Ang hapdi.

Was it... jealousy?

Thank you so much, Frostpages.

Please, if you're reading this guys, consider following him/her on TikTok

Author's Note:

Hey loves! 🌙

If you enjoyed this chapter, please don't forget to vote, comment, and share. It might seem like a small thing, but it's already huge for me—and it truly encourages me to keep writing. 💌

Thank you for being here.Love,Vesper □✧

CHAPTER 15

I suddenly see him in my side eyes, walking toward me, holding two chairs. Tangina. Dito niya uupo si Dr. Paulina? Talaga ba? 'Pag inupuan sila sa harap ko, pagbubuhulin ko sila. Sa leeg.

I tried to look away, pretend I didn't see, but then—

"Sit beside me, Solana." Napako ako sa kinatatayuan ko. Napaturo ako sa sarili ko. As if may ibang Solana pa sa paligid.

"Me?" I croaked.

"Yes." Short. Firm. Walang pasubali.

Naramdaman kong lahat ng mata sa room ay lumipad sa amin. Pero nang nagsimula na ang meeting, unti-unti namang nawala ang atensyon. Except...

Except for Dra. Pauline. She kept glancing. Not at doc, but at me. Those kind of glances na parang may gustong sabihin. O iparamdam.

I swallowed my pride and ignored her. I stayed quiet the whole meeting. But this man beside me? He just wouldn't stop bugging me.

"Are you hungry or thirsty? I can text Erickson." He leaned a bit and whispered,

Napalingon ako sa kanya, mariin ang titig. *Really?* Meeting to. May rector sa harap. . Tapos siya, tanong ng tanong kung gutom ako?

"Doc, okay lang po ako." Umiling ako, still listening to the meeting

"Are you sure?" he pressed, shifting slightly to face me more. I just nodded. I never thought he'd be this persistent.

Meeting ended at 3.

Mga medical staff agad na lumapit kay Dr. Demirian, halos lahat gusto siyang kausapin. Doctors from other hospitals, heads of departments, even si Dra. Pauline na parang hindi na bumitaw sa tabi niya. Tanga nalang talaga ako kung makisiksik pa ako ro'n. So I did what I do best, umalis tahimik.

I didn't see Ericka or Simon. Siguro lumabas na rin. O baka nakihalubilo pa sa faculty.

Ako? Diretso sa waiting shed, naghihintay ng jeep. Gusto ko na lang bumalik sa hospital, ituloy ang shift ko. Tahimik. Normal. Walang tension. Walang tingin. Walang... Doc.

But of course, it's not that easy

Kasi sa mismong harap ko, huminto ang isang mamahaling kotse. Kilala ko na ang tunog, ang kulay, ang forma. I stood frozen. Maybe he was waiting for Dra. Pauline?

My heart jumped the moment the horn blared. I just ignored it.

The tinted window slowly rolled down, revealing that same unreadable expression of his.

"Do you really want me to drag you here the way I want, Solana?"

I gulped and hurriedly opened the passenger door. Agad akong pumasok, hindi na nagtanong pa. Kasi kilala ko na siya, Kapag sinabi niyang *"drag you,"*

he just might mean it.

Or maybe...
he has a different way of dragging.Namula ang mukha ko sa naisip.

Pinikit ko na lang ang mga mata ko at kinain ako ng antok. Hindi ko na namalayan ang pag-andar ng sasakyan, parang dinala na rin ng hangin ang bigat sa dibdib ko.

I just awakened when he softly tapped my cheek.

"Hey," he said, voice low. "We're here." Napasinghap ako, eyes fluttering open.

He was leaning just a bit closer than necessary, one brow raised.Putangina. Kaya pala ang dami niyang nasasaktan, kahit gising ka, para ka pa ring nananaginip.

"D-Doc," I croaked, voice still groggy.

He went out and opened the door for me.

"Let's have snack first. It's already 3:30," he said casually

O-okay..." I answered, trying to swallow my nerves as he placed his hand on my back again, gently guiding me to the café's entrance. I'm getting.....used to that touch.

Tahimik akong nagkuwenta sa utak ko. May extra pa ba akong pera? Kasi baka sa mga susunod na araw, hangin na lang ulam ko.

Pag-upo namin, kinuha ko agad ang menu. I scanned it like my life depended on it—then halos malaglag eyeballs ko.

Caffe Latte – ₱750. Tangina. May ginto ba yung cream nila?

Tiningnan ko pa ibang items. Cappuccino? ₱820. Chocolate croissant? ₱680. Isang slice ng cake? ₱900!

I scanned the whole menu.

I smiled at him awkwardly, pilit, habang pinipigilan kong mapangiwi. Just in time, the waiter came.

"Can I take your order, Ma'am? Sir?"

"Yes," he said, without missing a beat. "I'll have one Iced Americano, extra shot, less ice."

Tumango ang waiter and looked at me.

"Uhm..." I glanced at the menu again, praying na baka may tago silang section na pang-masa. Wala.

"I'll just have... water po." There was a short pause. Kahit yung waiter parang napatigil.

He tilted his head. His eyes were warm, patient.

"She'll have an Iced Americano, Tuna Melt Sandwich, and Tiramisu for dessert. Make that two tiramisus." he muttered, handing the menu back to the waiter. "She tends to skip real meals."

Tangina. Na-profile pa ako. The waiter nodded and left.

I sank into my seat, lowering my head as I poked my fingers together under the table.

"Mahal 'yung tiramisu na 'yon," I whispered, just loud enough for him to hear.

He looked at me, leaned a bit forward, and I saw it, he twisted his lips like he was trying so hard not to smile... but he failed.

A small smile escaped him.

"Then consider this a public health intervention." he said softly,

The orders were served, and hindi ko maiwasang mamangha. Ang bango, ang ayos ng plating, parang ayaw mong galawin. I stared at the tiramisu for a second, then took a bite.

Heaven. Literal. I took another bite, and then another. Parang wala akong pakialam sa mundo.

When I looked up, I caught him. Doc Demirian. Just calmly sipping his iced Americano, eyes on me. He didn't say anything, but there was a subtle smirk playing on his lips, like he was amused... or like he was happy seeing me like this.

I quickly looked away and swung my feet silently under the table, trying to hide my flushed cheeks

"Is it good?" Simple. Deep. Direct. Parang ang bigat sa hangin ng tanong niya.

Super," I whispered, eyes on the table, "parang first time ko ulit makakain ng pang-mayaman."

He chuckled, soft and deep. "Then we'll come here more often."

I was happily eating my tiramisu, eyes closed, swinging my feet under the table, when a voice sliced through the air behind me.

Feminine. Too familiar. Nakakairita

"Dr. Demirian? Hi again, it's such a coincidence to see you here."

Dr. Demirian didn't even bother to stand. Didn't even smile. His hand stayed wrapped around his iced Americano as he glanced up briefly, then gave a slow, short nod.

"Dr. Paulina."

I kept my eyes down. Hindi ko alam kung lilunok ko ba yung tiramisu o isusuka.

"And you're with...?" she asked, her tone edged with something plastic.

Her eyes scanned me like I was a stain on the marble floor.

I gave her a polite, forced smile. Weak. Defensive.

"An intern?" she added—like it was a goddamn crime.

"Anyway!" she chirped, too brightly.

"I was actually about to call you kanina. You left your silver watch at the bar the other night, remember? You left in such a rush. Buti nalang I saw you here."

Bar?

My grip on the fork loosened. I froze. A quiet sting ran through my chest.

Dr. Demirian slightly shifted in his seat. I felt it, even without looking. Then, slowly, he turned his gaze toward me.

Worried.

"I'll tell Erickson, Decran, or any of my friends who I was with in that bar—regarding that matter," he said calmly, but his eyes were sharp as they met hers, like he was warning her to stop.

He didn't say it like he was explaining, he said it like he was protecting.

She gave one last fake smile before finally walking away. The moment she left, I exhaled. I didn't even realize I was holding my breath.

The silence returned.

But this time, it wasn't comfortable.

Author's Note
Hey loves! 🌙
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Thank you for being here.

With love,
Vesper □✧

CHAPTER 16

Kinabukasan, handa na kami papuntang Sitio Makalipay para sa medical mission. Mataas ang lugar, malubak ang daan, at may hiking pa raw.

I was about to close my eyes. Pagod ako, and knowing na puno na ang van at anytime aalis na rin ito, saktong pang power nap muna. Pero napamulat ako nang marinig ko ang boses ni Erickson.

Kinakausap niya ang driver sa harap.

Tangina.

Binuksan ni Erickson ang pinto ng van at diretsong tumingin sa akin. Gusto ko na lang maging invisible.

"Ma'am Solana, pinapatawag po kayo ni Doc Demirian." Pumikit ako. Ano pa bang gusto niya? Gago ba siya? Lahat ng mata nasa akin.

Huminga ako ng malalim at sumunod kay Erickson. Tinulungan niya ako buhatin ang mga gamit ko, at nang makalabas na kami, bigla na lang umarangkada ang van. Walang lingon.

"Erickson, bakit daw ako pinatawag?" tanong ko, frustrated.

"Hindi ko ho alam, ma'am. Pero—ayan na po si Doc."

May paparating na sasakyan,

Huminto ang Ford! sa harap ko. Tangina! Ilang sasakyan ba meron 'tong lalaking 'to?

Bumaba siya. Bumaba si Dr. Demirian wearing a fitted black V-neck shirt, tight sa dibdib, hapit sa braso. Tapos naka nude tailored shorts, above the knee, hugging his thighs. Pair that with white sneakers and his signature black watch and a black Nike cap.

While I'm wearing a Black shorts, just the right length, not too short, not too long.
Fitted white T-shirt, medyo hapit sa baywang, at black sneakers

He walked toward me slowly, holding his car keys, his other hand casually tucked in his pocket.

"Let's go, Solana."

No explanations.
No extra words.

And I .....I just nodded, heart pounding for reasons I didn't want to name.

He expertly maneuvered the car after Erickson placed my bags in the back.

Inside, the air was cool. Calm.
Too calm.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, glancing at me quickly before returning his eyes to the road.

"Hindi ho, Doc. Ayos lang po ako," I replied without looking at him, eyes fixed outside the window. He sighed, low, almost frustrated. Then made a sudden left turn.

I blinked. Drive-thru? Jollibee.

Tangina.
My favorite.

Kailan pa ba 'yung huling kain ko rito? Panahon pa ng may load ako?

He pulled up to the speaker.

"What's yours, Solana?"
His voice was low, calm, but there was something in it.
Like he already knew what I liked.

His eyes were *gentle*. Watching me.

My throat tightened.
"Uh..Coke Float lang." naka budget na allowance ko.

He nodded and turned back to order.

No complaints. No judgment.
"One Yumburger meal. With Coke Float. Large fries."

"And one Chickenjoy. Extra gravy. And pineapple juice." Then he added,

Hindi ako magbabayad n'yan, Doc ha, wala akong pera. Sabi ko sundae lang!" I said, half-joking, half-seryoso habang nakatitig sa Coke Float at Yumburger

"I won't mind spending my savings and budget for you, Solana," he said calmly while passing the food to me.

I gasped. As if mababankrupt ka, Doc I rolled my eyes, but inside? Tangina.

Kinikilig ako.Pero hindi pupwede. Bawal Solana.

We were in the middle of the road, mga puno na lang ang tanaw ko, wala nang buildings. Tahimik. Presko. Pero hindi ako kampante.

"Who took you home kagabi?" he asked, eyes on the road. "Was it your co-worker? Or... one of your suitors?"

Nakita niya? I did everything para iwasan siya kahapon after what happened sa café. Buti na lang mukhang effective.

Anong suitor-suitor ang pinagsasasabi ng gagong 'to?

"Si Albert po, kasamahan ko sa trabaho. Hindi po 'yun manliligaw." I made sure to emphasize kasamahan. Hindi kami talo ni Albert. *Ikaw din gusto noon, Doc!*

I like him. I figured it out.

I know this was all just guilt. Guilt from what he did sa café. Kaya siya bumawi. Kaya siya naging mabait. Hindi ako espesyal. Na-konsensya lang siya.

I sighed heavily, hoping it could somehow drain the sting in my chest.

He just nodded, jaw tight. Tahimik. Pero obvious.

Napakamot sa sentido, then cleared his throat.

"Erickson got it already. It was Declan who saw it. We were just celebrating his birthday in the club. I didn't know Dr. Pauline was there. We haven't even talked. I went home early." Just... honest, almost begging

Parang gusto niyang malinawan ako. Parang importante sa kanya na hindi ko siya ma-misunderstand.

My mouth dropped. *Did he just... explain?*

Dr. Malrick Virellus Valtar Demirian, heir to the Demiefian empire, known for not giving a single damn about anyone's opinion, just explained himself

"A-ayos lang ho, Doc..." I muttered, unsure where to put my eyes.

"Can you drop the 'ho' or 'po'? I'm not that old, Solana."

That made me blink. Then I gave him a playful look.
"Talaga? Ilang taon ka na ba? Kasi... 22 pa lang ako e." I knew there was an age gap. I just didn't know how wide it really was.

"Twenty-seven." He said it so simply.

Then raised a brow.
"Why? Older men aren't your liking?"

Tangina, binanatan ako ng Doc ng ganon?

"Hmm. Puwede naman... pero wala akong oras diyan." I shrugged, trying to look casual even though my pulse just doubled.

And then, he laughed. Inside the car. Genuine.
Low. Rough. Baritone.
Putangina, was that legal? I couldn't help but smile too, kahit pilit.
Damn this heart.

After an hour and a half, we finally reached the base of the mountain. Nakita ko na sina Ericka at Simon near the first aid tent. I waved at them, but I didn't leave Doc's side just yet.

And then I saw her, Dr. Pauline.

Walking straight toward us. She eyed me from head to toe, sharp and slow.

Then she frowned.

She was wearing a fitted purple shirt, matching leggings, and black training shoes—

I straightened my back unconsciously.

"Hello, Doc," Dr. Pauline said, her voice all sweet and rehearsed. "I was waiting for you sa van. Akala ko you'd ride with us, kaya I

reserved you a seat."

Dr. Demirian didn't even flinch. He was busy pulling out bags from the car trunk, mine included.

"You're with the intern?" she added with a smirk. "Late ba siya kaya pinasabay?" He had the nerve to touch Dr. Demirian's arm.

Tangina mo. Hindi ako late. Pinababa ako ni Doc mismo.

This time, Dr. Demirian straightened up and finally looked at her. His tone was flat, cool as ice.

"Yes, I'm with her. And no, she wasn't late."
A slight pause.
"If you'll excuse me."

"D-Doc... ako na po sa bag ko," I said, reaching for it.

He grabbed the bigger bag, probably his, and *mine*. Yes. My bag.

"No. I'll carry it. It's too heavy for you." Then he gave me a once-over, expression unreadable.
"Look at your arms, Solana. Thin as a stick."

What the—
I frowned and stormed off ahead of him, but I heard him chuckle behind me.

Ready na ba ang lahat sa juicy part? HAHAHAAHHA

Author's Note

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Thank you for being here.

Love,Vesper □✧

CHAPTER 17

The path going up Sitio Makalipay was steep, halos trekking levels. The terrain wasn't kind, loose soil everywhere, and the heat didn't help. But Dr. Demirian was always near, guiding my steps when the road got tricky.

And unfortunately, guiding Dr. Pauline too, who happened to be walking in front of me.

"Dr. Demirian," she purred, turning halfway. "Can you help me fix the towel behind my back? It keeps slipping."

Tangina ka.
I clenched my teeth and quickened my pace. Hindi ko na tinignan kung anong ginagawa nila. Bahala kayo d'yan. Maglampungan kayo. Magkagulungan pa kayo sa lupa for all I care.

I told myself I didn't care. Wala akong karapatan.
I really tried to believe I didn't care.

But my chest—putangina, it felt tight again.

Around 11 a.m., we finally arrived at Sitio Kalipay. The air smelled of damp earth and sun-warmed grass. Hindi pa man nakakapagpahinga, si Dr. Demirian agad nang nagsimula, parang sundalong nakaprograma. The team started setting up the medical tents while the rest of us scattered to begin the mission.

Children and elders crowded around us, most of them obviously malnourished. Sunken cheeks, dry skin, and visible ribs. Parang sinuntok ang puso ko sa bawat tingin.

"Hello! Anong pangalan mo?" I smiled at a little girl with tangled hair and a faded dress.

"Anari po," she answered shyly, her eyes stuck on the syringe in my hand.

"Ganda! Hindi ito masakit ha? Parang kagat lang ng langgam," I reassured her, chuckling. She giggled back, easing her tension.

Then, *out of nowhere*, she tilted her head and asked,
"May asawa po kayo?" Napakagat ako sa labi, caught off-guard.

"Wala... pero may gusto ako." I smiled playfully, not expecting a follow-up.

She blinked and I pointed someone behind her.
"Can you see that doctor over there?"

He was crouched in front of an old man, checking blood pressure with sharp focus, sleeves rolled just enough to reveal his forearm veinss, trademark na n'ya siguro 'yon.

Anari nodded.
"Gusto ko siya. Gustong gusto." Napatawa ako nang mahina, pero agad kong pinigilan. Pero hindi pwede. Bawal.

Hindi sa dahil intern ako. Hindi rin dahil doctor siya.

Basta may mga linyang hindi pwedeng tawirin, kahit gusto mo.

Madilim na ang kalangitan habang kumakain kami ng hapunan. Ilang ilaw lang ang nagsisilbing liwanag sa paligid, kandila at gasera. Ang mga anino ng mga tao'y gumagalaw kasabay ng tunog ng mga huni ng kuliglig.

Nanlilit ang mata ko habang pinagmamasdan silang masayang nagkukuwentuhan.
Simon at Ericka...
Mukha silang close. Guni-guni ko lang ba? Pero parang may something.

"You're not eating, Solana." Naputol ang pag-iisip ko.

"Mamaya na ho, Doc. Hindi pa ho ako gutom," I replied, trying to smile.

His eyes narrowed.
"I told you to drop the *ho* and *po*. It makes me sound ancient."

Napangiti ako, pero pilit, wala akong lakas, nakakapanghina
"Okay, We'll eat later," He added

Tumabi siya sa akin at umupo sa lumang kahoy na bangko. Tahimik naming pinanood ang mga nakatatanda na sumasayaw ng katutubong sayaw sa gitna ng clearing. May kakaibang lamig sa hangin, pero kakaibang init sa pagitan namin.

Natapos akong kumain, pero hindi ko na mahagilap si Doc. May

tumawag daw sa kanya.

Si Dra. Paulina.

Saan kaya sila pumunta?
At bakit ang tagal? Tahimik na. Lahat ay tulog na.

Pumasok na ako sa tent ko. Pagod na pagod na rin ako.
Nagpalit ako ng damit, spaghetti strap at cotton shorts. Gusto ko sanang kahit papaano, komportable ang tulog ko kahit nasa bundok kami.

Ni hindi pa ako nakakalahating tulog nang may narinig ako sa labas.

Mahinang boses.
Malamlam. Paos.

"Sol..."
"Solana."

Nakilala ko agad ang tinig.
Tangina. Malrick.

Binuksan ko ang zipper ng tent. Nandoon siya, naka-jogger, puting T-shirt, magulo ang buhok, parang bata na hindi mapakali.

"Can I come in?" he asked softly, one hand combing his eyebrows in nervousness.

Napatingin lang ako sa kanya saglit, bago ako tumabi para makapasok siya.

"Anong kailangan mo, Doc?" I asked, my voice low.

Umupo siya, at halos matamaan na ang tuhod ko. Maliit lang ang tent.

"I can't sleep," he admitted, voice hoarse. "I'm having a hard time sleeping."

"Talaga?" I scoffed. "Bakit hindi mo tanungin si Doctora kung ganun?" Alam kong may halong sarcasm ang boses ko. At hindi ko na tinago.

"Why are you asking me that?" brows furrowing as he looked at me, genuinely confused. is gaze lingered, searching my face for a hint, anything that would explain why I suddenly brought it up.

"Tinawag ka niya. Nakita ko kayo. Pumunta kayo sa madilim na parte. Nagtagal kayo doon." Umatras ako ng bahagya, pero maliit lang ang tent...

Hindi ko siya kayang takasan.

He leaned slightly toward me, brows knitted, jaw clenched. He ran a hand through his hair, clearly frustrated, not at me, but at the situation.

"No, Solana. Baby, that's not what you're thinking. Damn." His voice dropped, gentler this time.

"We were not alone, Mang Larong, one of the tribe's heads, approached us. Nilalagnat daw ang asawa niya." He stepped closer, eyes locked on mine

"Talk to me, baby. Not your thoughts. Please." His voice was low, but it wrapped around me like a steady pulse, firm, warm, and pleading.

I froze. My fingers clutched the edge of the blanket without knowing why. My heart? It was too loud. My breath? Too careful.

"O-Okay..." Cat got my tongue. My brain, too.

"Okay?" he repeated, brows furrowed like he couldn't believe I said that.
"That's it?"

I bit my lower lip.
"I... I don't know what to say," I admitted, voice barely above a whisper.

"For the first time in my life, I'm trying to be honest, vulnerable, even, and all I get is an 'okay'?"

I looked at him, guilt swelling inside me.

"I'm not used to this," I finally blurted out.

"Come here, baby," he whispered.

I hesitated, heart racing, breath uneven. But I followed.
I stepped closer, only for him to gently tap his lap, silently offering it.

I froze.
Seriously?

But he didn't say a word. He just waited.

So... I did. Silently.
I sat on his lap, facing him. His hands immediately wrapped around my waist, pulling me close like I belonged there all along.
He hugged me, tight, warm, grounding.

"I'll wait. Just don't shut me out, Solana."Silince. I just nodded

"Oh, hell... you smell so damn good, baby," he murmured against my skin, voice low and raspy. "You're fucking addictive."

I gasped quietly when his lips brushed softly against the side of my neck—a barely-there kiss that sent shivers crawling down my spine.

My fingers instinctively found his hair, threading through the strands as I gripped gently, grounding myself in the heat of the moment.

His arms tightened around my waist.

"Is this okay?" he asked, his voice trembling slightly, hoarseI Ijust nodded. I lost my voice.

Masarap sa pakiramdam.

I didn't know what this feeling was—
This warmth, this calm, this quiet rush in my chest.
But somehow...
I liked it.

And for once...
I didn't fight it.

"Solana... baby, please," he whispered, voice thick with emotion as his lips brushed gently against my upper breast. My breath hitched.

"I'm so in love with you," he murmured, eyes locked with mine as if those words were the most honest thing he'd ever said.

My heart pounded in my chest, loud enough to drown out the quiet around us.

"I've tried to hold back," he continued, voice shaking, "but every time I look at you... every time you smile, laugh, breathe, I lose it."

I looked down at him to say something, but he approached me with his warm lips, like a hungry animal that had been hibernating for a

month. I don't know how I responded, but I followed the rhythm.

A low moan escaped my lips as his touch ignited a fire, a desperate need that consumed me utterly.

"Fuck, baby " he word a breathless plea, He groaned, as his bulge grow

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ANO NA? hahah tama na siguro to? Baka macomatose ako, see you next year ! hoyyyyyy hindi pupwede. HAHAH abang2 sa next chapter Vesperians

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Love,Vesper □✧

CHAPTER 18

Masarap. Nakakapanibago. Kahit malamig ang panahon, hindi hadlang iyon para maramdaman ang init ng aming katawan. Tahimik lang ang paligid, pero ramdam ko ang bawat tibok ng puso ko, lalo na nang lumapat ang noo niya sa noo ko. His breath was warm, heavy.

"Malrick..." I whispered, barely audible. "This... this feels too much."

Tangina. Ang lakas ng tibok ng puso ko. Parang may rumaragasa sa loob ng dibdib ko. And when his lips touched mine again. Napikit ako.

I touched his hair, down to his neck and to his muscle as he suck my upper part chest. Tangina! I moaned, suppressing it in case someone heard.

He slipped off my spaghetti straps and bra, then eagerly suckled my breasts.

His bite on my nipple made me close my eyes tight.

" Ahh D-Doc " I moaned again.

"It's Malrick, baby. Call me by my fucking name," he said, kissing me again hungrily. He sucked my tongue. Tangina!

"M-Malrick , ahhhh ,hmm God" He roughly cupped and squeezed my breasts and sucked it again. Napaliyad ako.

" Baby stopped moaning so loud." He stopped kissing me. Gago ba siya?

"Ahhhh hhmmmm" I gasped and covered my mouth. Good God!

He keep on sucking my breast, sapalitan. He pushed me down, pressing his erection against me, I involuntary grin.

"Fucking hell, baby, stop," he groaned, his eyes squeezed shut like he was struggling.

" No. No.. I respect you, I respect you so much " He looked at me with such tenderness. I nodded, still catching my breath.

He just chuckled softly, then pulled me into a tight. I reached for my

spaghetti strap top and slowly slipped it back on, my hands trembling slightly.

"B-Bakit?" I asked, voice low and unsure, heart thudding in my chest.

His eyes didn't leave mine.

He smirked, eyes glinting with mischief.
"You have a bad mouth... you called God earlier."

Nanlaki ang mata ko. Tangina. Napasapak ko siya sa braso, di ko na napigilan.

"Loko ka talaga! Ano bang pinagsasabi mo?" Everyone would lose their minds if they found out sinapak ko ang boss nila.

Pero tumawa lang siya ng malakas, puno ng tuwa.

He leaned in, whispering near my ear,

"Mas bagay sayo galit. Nakakagigil."

"Gago ka" I muttered, pero hindi ko mapigilan ang ngiti ko.

He grinned like the devil he is, eyes gleaming in the dim light of the tent.
"Just saying the truth, baby."

"Umalis ka nga," I repeated, pushing his chest—but his body didn't even move. Matigas. Gago talaga.

He chuckled, that low, sinful sound again, and leaned in. His lips brushed my forehead gently.
"Goodnight, my Solana."

Tapos, he crawled out of the tent like nothing happened, like he didn't just wreck my soul and sanity.

I lay back, pulling the thin blanket over me.
But how the hell can I sleep now when every inch of me still remembers his touch?

Naka-ngiti pa rin ako kahit wala na siya sa tent. Para akong baliw, yakap-yakap ang kumot

Kinabukasan, maaga naming sinimulan ang trabahong naiwan kahapon, last day na kasi ng medical mission.

"Nanay, inumin niyo po ito tatlong beses sa isang araw ha?" I reminded gently while handing over the small pack of medicine. Matanda na siya, halos puti na lahat ng buhok, pero matalim pa rin ang mata. Umupo siya sa harap ko, nanginginig ang kamay.

"Oo, Nurse. Salamat at nagpunta kayo rito. Habang buhay naming tatanawin 'to." she said, voice full of sincerity, sabay hawak sa kamay ko at bahagyang pinisil iyon.

"Kayo po ang mag-ingat, Nay. Babalik po kami... balang araw."

She nodded, misty-eyed.

Nanay stood up after our heartfelt conversation, bitbit ang gamot habang pabalik sa pila ng mga matatanda.

I was writing her name down sa log sheet when someone's shadow blocked the sun in front of me. Akala ko isa na namang Mang hihingi ng gamot o reseta.

Pagtingala ko—

Grumpy Malrick Dermirian.

Nakasalubong ang kilay, nakatayo sa harapan ko, at tinititigan ako na parang ako 'yung may sakit.

"Hihingi ka rin ng gamot?" I said, sarcastically. "Anong sakit mo, Doc?" sabay angat ng kilay.

He leaned forward, arms crossed over his chest. His white shirt clung to his chest with every breath

"May gamot ka ba sa masakit ang puson?" Tangina! Napalunok ako. Napapikit. Parang biglang nag-shutdown ang utak ko.

"May mga tao— umayus ka "I hissed, namumula ang pisngi ko habang naghanap ng ibang staff sa paligid.

"Ikaw rin. Ayusin mo 'yan. you're red as a tomato." He smirked. Tangina! Wala talagang filter bibig nito.

"Lumayas ka nga!" I snapped, half-laughing, half-embarrassed. He

suppressed his laugh, tumingala pa na parang nanunukso. Gago talaga!

Hindi pa siya kuntento, nagsalita na naman.

"You haven't eaten. Come on, lunch is ready."

"Ayoko. Masakit paa ko," I murmured while shaking my head, trying not to look amused.

"Hmm..." He leaned closer, his voice low and teasing. "I'll massage your feet later after we go down this sitio. But first, I'll get our lunch. Wait here."

Naglakad siya palayo, and I just stared at his back, speechless. Everyone was eyeing Dr. Demirian. He was wearing black shorts that hugged just above his knees, a white Nike shirt with the check logo, a sleek watch, and black sneakers this time.

A few minutes passed and he came back holding two plates. I blinked when I saw what was on them.

Buttered shrimp. My weakness.

Akala ko ibibigay lang niya ang plato, aalis na at sasabay sa mga kasamahan niyang doctor para kumain. Pero nagkamali ako.

Umupo siya sa tabi ko, parang wala lang.

"Wag ka nga rito! Pinag-titinginan tayo, Malrick," I said through gritted teeth

"The hell I care, Solana," he said, frowning, like it was the most natural thing in the world to sit beside me like that.

Sigurado akong hindi lang chismis ang aabutin ko nito.

I looked around, lahat talaga nakatingin. Except for Simon and Ericka under the tree, na parang nasa sariling mundo

Kakain na sana ako ng may boses na dumisturbo sa katahimikan ng tiyan ko.

"Hi, Doc. Can I share a table with you? Wala na kasing pwesto," she said sweetly—too sweet.

Pwesto? Eh napakalawak ng area. Kahit kumain ka pa sa paanan ng

bundok, may view ka pa sa sunset.

Malrick didn't even lift his gaze. Busy siya sa pagtanggal ng balat ng hipon, parang wala siyang narinig.

Ako na lang ang sumalo ng init ng eksena.

"Y-Yes po, Dra. Upo po kayo," I answered, half-smiling, half-dying inside.

"Great! Thank you, Intern Solana," she said with a grin while gracefully sitting across us.

Intern. Intern. Intern. Tila sinasadyang ulitin. Paulit-ulit. Parang gusto niyang i-print sa noo ko.

"Why are you in his table, by the way? You have a problem dealing with the tribes, Intern Solana?" Her voice was honey, but the tone had venom.

Bago pa ako makasagot, naramdaman kong huminto si Malrick sa ginagawa. He wiped his hand with a napkin, calm but dangerous.

Problem with the tribes? Tadyakan kita dyan eh.

"Opo Doc" I just nodded. Ayoko na ng issue. I just wanna eat my damn rice in peace.

But this man in front of me, si Malrick, gave me a peeled shrimp on my plate.

Tangina naman talaga Malrick!

Dr. Paulina's eyes widened. Napasinghap siya at tumikhim.

Malrick carried my things without being asked. Backpack, sleeping bag, pati 'yung maliit kong eco-bag na may tsinelas, lahat.

Dr. Paulina? yung tingin niya? Parang laser beam. Buong pagbaba ng bundok, parang siya nagdadala ng galit ng ancestors niya.

Tangina! Edi solohin niya si Doc!

Habang naglalakad ako pabalik sa van, I heard his voice.

"It's getting foggy, come on," he said, holding my elbow gently

"Sa 'yo parin ako sasakay?" I murmured

"Yes, to my car, Solana," he answered with that smirk again—'yung smirk na parang may balak.

"Sa sasakyan nga!" I said, eyes wide, pretending I didn't feel my face heating up.

"Yes... what else did I say, baby?" He leaned a bit, grin growing wider.

I rolled my eyes hard enough, then stormed to his car.

Nauna na akong sumakay habang siya, hayop na 'to, tumatawa pa rin na parang high school na bagong naka-score sa crush.

"Tanga," I muttered under my breath,

Someone called him,another doctor, probably from St. Luke's. I didn't bother to check. I just closed my eyes. Hindi ko na namalayan na nakatulog na pala ako.

Bago tuluyang mawalan ng malay, naramdaman ko ang banayad na dampi ng halik niya sa tungki ng ilong ko at isa pa sa aking noo.

I only woke up when I felt something soft draped over me, a blanket. I opened my eyes just a bit, enough to see him, but not enough for him to know I was awake.

He was driving silently. Calm. Focused. The city lights reflected on his sharp jawline and calm expression.

One hand on the wheel. The other... resting gently on my thigh.

Not just resting, caressing. His fingers moved slowly, rhythmically

"You're awake now," he said softly, not even glancing, just sensing it. "Are you hungry?"

I just nodded, still not speaking. His hand remained where it was.

Tahimik lang ako, hanggang sa huminto kami sa harap ng isang high-end restaurant

"Dito?" tanong ko habang sinusulyapan siya.

"Malrick... sa iba nalang. Jollibee man lang sana..." I said, trying to sound casual kahit may kaba sa loob.

"Why? Is there something wrong in this restaurant?" he asked, confused

"Gago ka ba? Tingnan mo nga itong suot ko"

White, loose shirt, black short shorts, black sneakers! He eyed me, kaya lalo akong na-conscious.

"Still damn gorgeous, baby. Come on, I know you're hungry," he said with that stupidly confident smirk.

Wala na akong nagawa. I just swallowed the embarrassment and got out when he opened the door for me.

This time, he held my waist, not the casual, half-second touch sa likod like before. He gripped it. Firm. Possessive. Like he was silently saying, *"Mine."*

"Malrick... ang kamay mo..." I whispered angrily, leaning slightly away. People were looking. The couple in front of us even raised their brows.

Kilala yata siya dito, the manager greeted him by name kanina pa.

"Let them look." he murmured, eyes locked on mine, "They should know who you're with."

Tangina niya talaga. Hindi ko alam kung matutunaw ako o tatakbo palabas.

Ooooooppppsss! Hindi natuloy, akala nyo ha. HAHAHAHA

THANK YOU augustaurelia and zelmae30 for commenting. I appreciate it a lot. Thank you so os much. Mabuhay hanggat gusto niyo.

Author's Note

Hey loves! 🌙

If you enjoyed this chapter, please don't forget to vote, comment, and share. It might seem like a small thing, but it's already huge for me—and it truly encourages me to keep writing. 💌

Thank you for being here.

Love,Vesper ✧

CHAPTER 19

"May I take your order, sir? . . . Ma'am?"
The waitress looked hesitant , mukha ba akong maid? Gago 'to ah.

"I'll just have the Wagyu Ribeye, medium rare, with truffle mashed potatoes on the side," Malrick said smoothly, handing over the menu without even glancing at it too long.

"And a glass of 2009 Château Margaux red wine" he added.

I frowned. Tunog pa lang, parang isang buwang tuition ko na.

He looked at me, soft eyes under that sharp jawline.
"What's yours, baby?" His voice low. Calm. Sure.

He patiently waited, like ordering with me in this expensive place was the highlight of his day.

I swallowed. The menu felt heavier than my wallet.
"Uh... no water this time please, it's on me." He added.

Hindi pa rin ako makapili. Parang lahat may presyo ng tuition fee.

Tumikhim siya at tumingin sa waiter.
"Can you wait for a while? She's still thinking." Napatuwid ako ng upo. Nakakahiya kay waiter, Malrick naman kasi!

"Uhh... Buttered shirmp with rice na lang po," I said softly to the waitress

"Is that all?" He looked at me, confused. Kulang daw yata? I just nodded para matapos na.

He sighed, then looked at the waiter.
"Just add a slice of blueberry cheesecake, and a cup of Spanish latte."he said, resting his arm behind my chair again.

Tumango ang waiter at bumalik na sa counter.

Malrick put his hand over my shoulder, pulling me just a little closer, his warm breath brushed the edge of my ear.

"You smell like a baby...hmmmm hell yeah," he murmured, hoarse and

low, still smelling me

Napakagat ako sa labi. Tangina, juicy cologne lang 'yon doc!

I glanced around and caught a customer at the next table whispering while looking at us. Gusto ko na lang ma-evaporate sa upuan.

"What are your plans? For tomorrow?" He leaned back a little .Tumingin siya sa akin na para bang ako na lang ang natitirang bagay sa mundo worth noticing.

I teased, trying to shake off the heat rising to my cheeks.
"Nagiging noisy ka na, at clingy, doc."

"Why? You don't like clingy boyfriend now?" He raised a brow at that. His lips twitched.

Napasinghap ako.
Tangina.

"Boyfriend? Anong pinagsasabi mo diyan, wala akong time," I said, half-joking, trying not to choke on the ice water I was nervously sipping.

Bigla siyang tumingin sa akin with those dark. Napahagikhik ako sa isipan

"Can I buy your time then? Name it." Sabay kuha ng wallet niya.

He casually pulled out his black card and placed it on the table. Nanlaki ang mata ko.

"I'll pay in full—with interest." he added.

Yabang!.

He drove me home after a long day, and somewhere along the road, I noticed a car following us.

"Si Erickson lang 'yan," he said calmly, noticing my worry. "I asked him to make sure we get home safe."

I just nodded and closed my eyes. Such a tiring day.

"Baby, wake up. We're here."

I blinked my eyes open. Nakatulog pala ako? It was already dark

outside.

He got out and gently opened the door for me. I stepped out, fixing my hair when I noticed something in his hand.

A Jollibee paper bag. He saw me eyeing it and grinned, a little smug but mostly sweet.

"I dropped by the Jollibee drive-thru, so if you get hungry, you won't have to cook anymore" Namula ang mukha ko. .

Pero sa totoo lang, hindi naman sa chicken joy ako natutuwa, Siya kasi 'yung nagdala. Tangina Solana, maharot ka.

I opened the door to my apartment and stepped inside, expecting him to say goodbye. But of course, Dr. Malrick Demirian, unbothered, unstoppable, invited himself in like he owned the place.

He stepped in slowly, scanning every corner like a hawk on duty.

"Hmm..." he muttered, eyes trailing from my tiny living area to the small kitchen.

"How long have you been here? H asked.

"Since high school pa. Matagal-tagal na rin." I scratched the back of my neck and replied, as I sat on the bed

He glanced at me sideways, one brow raised. Tangina. Parang CR lang 'tong apartment ko kumpara sa mansion niya.

"You're brave, baby. I'm proud of you," he said softly, then sat beside me on the bed, his hand gently brushing mine.

"Talaga ba?" I narrowed my eyes at him, kunwari galit. "Eh sinabihan mo pa nga ako dati na not mindful and not intelligent."

"Damn! Don't make me remember that. You don't know how much that scene makes me wanna punch my fucking face. I haven't been sleeping properly for days, seriously." He groaned and leaned his head back, clearly tortured by the memory.

Then he hugged me from the side, his arm wrapping around my waist, pulling me close like he was trying to erase all those words from both our memories.

"Abay dapat lang!" I huffed, crossing my arms pero leaning sa kanya.

"Sinabihan mo pa akong lusting over Nurse Kael, eh binabae naman 'yon!"

"Realy? I had no idea!" sounding interested kahit hindi naman as he leaned closer and nuzzled his face into the side of my neck, inhaling softly.

"Wala ka naman talagang pakialam," I rolled my eyes, trying to hide the way my skin tingled

"All I care about is you, baby... If I say something stupid, just slap me. Don't ever believe I meant it. He kissed my neck, slow, like he was memorizing every inch of it.

Napapikit ako.

"I better get going," he whispered, lips brushing against my skin.

"It's too late. You should sleep."

"Buti alam mo," I murmured, but my voice betrayed me—it softened, nearly inviting.

Minutes passed, still, he didn't move away. He kissed my jaw this time, then went back to my neck like he couldn't help it.

"Akala ko uuwi ka na?" I asked, barely able to breathe.

"Nilalamok na si Erickson sa labas." He paused for a second, then kissed me again, deeper this time, as if my words didn't matter.

"Don't mention his name," he growled softly.

"Parang tanga ka talaga," I muttered, but I leaned in anyway, my hand gently resting on his chest.

And just like that, I knew... he wasn't leaving anytime soon.

"I'd rather just take you home with me than keep doing this... Every time I drop you off, I want to stay." still on my neck, kissing and sometimes sucking it.

"Taga-hatid na may kasamang kissing benefits?" I teased, raising a brow.

He chuckled.Umaalog pa ang balikat

"I'm just wondering if I can renovate your apartment," he said casually, like it would only cost him a piso

"Pag ginawa mo 'yon, hindi na ako magpapakita sa'yo." I turned to him, eyes narrowed. He groaned dramatically and hugged me tighter, burying his face into my neck like a sulking kid.

"Okay, " he sighed. "Then... how about putting stuff?"

"Stuff?' I asked. He said, like its only a stuffed toy.But I knew what he was referring to

"Yeah," he said so casually,

"Like television. So you won't get bored."

"Pag ginawa mo 'yan, hindi na talaga kita kikibuin. Manahimik ka diyan." slapping his arm lightly.

Gago ka talaga, Malrick

Author's Note

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Love,Vesper ✧

CHAPTER 20

Weeks passed. We became even closer. He would give me a ride after my shift, and alway she'd pick me up, too.

I was finger-combing my hair, inaayos ang bob cut hair , when a black Land Cruiser pulled up in front of the apartment.

Of course. Who else?

No other than Malrick. Fucking. Demirian.

Kahit ilang araw na niya akong sinusundo, hindi pa rin sanay ang mga putang ina kong kapitbahay na parang mababali na ang leeg sa kakalingon.

Eh dagdag mo pa si Aling Krosana, na akala mo'y nakakita ng walking diamond tuwing bumababa si Malrick , with his watch, his shirt na laging hapit sa braso, at yung aura niya na parang may sariling aircon kahit tirik ang araw.

"Let's go?" as he opened the door for me

I scanned him—white polo, black slacks na parang pina-plantsa habang suot, brown leather shoes na mas mahal pa yata sa monthly ko, and a silver watch na sumisigaw ng "I have a doctor's license and a trust fund." Tangina.

While me? Nude fitted sweater from ukay, black jeans na sumikip na sa bewang, and doll shoes na mukhang isang ulan nalang bibigay na.

"I don't mind you scanning me for hours though, but we're gonna be late, baby." He smirked.

Nanlaki mata ko. Parang nahuli akong nagnanakaw ng tingin.

"Mahangin!" bulalas ko, kunwari may bagyo.

He laughed, deep and smug.

Nang maatanaw ko ang hospital, hindi na ako mapakali.

"Uhh... dito nalang ako," I shyly said, eyes glued sa labas ng bintana.

"Why would I do that?" he frowned, glancing at me then back to the road.

"Eh kasi pag-titinginan nanaman tayo ng mga tao... nakakahiya," I muttered, halos maglaho na sa upuan. He paused ike the world paused with him, then slowly eyed me, serious.

"Who keeps staring at you badly? I'll fire them right away" Parang normal lang sa kanya ang magsibak ng staff . Gago talaga.

"Baliw ka ba?" I asked, eyes wide, di makapaniwala sa sinabi niya.

"Try me," he answered seriosly.

Pagkapark pa lang, bumaba na ako agad. I walked fast, okay, half running—para hindi halatang sabay kami. Ganon na palagi. Strategy ko na 'yan.

Nasa lobby na ako ng

"Why the hell are you walking away too fast from me, Solana?"

I froze. Everyone froze. Anesthesiologist , Radiologist Napa-pause sa pagbasa ng x-ray, akala may fracture na naman sa love life niya.

Tangina. Napaka-arte talaga

I rolled my eyes, internal scream, and walked faster like nothing happened. Bahala siya.

Just as I closed the elevator, he suddenly appeared, like a kid throwing a tantrum.

"Why the hell did you leave me there?" he snapped. Parang kasali sa seven deadly sins ang pag-iwan sa kanya.

"Eh m-masama nga tingin sa akin ng mga tao! Ayoko ng ganun," depensa ko, halos iwas tingin.

Pero naningkit ang mga mata niya, unti-unting dumilim ang aura.

"I'll ask Erickson to check the CCTV. Let's see who those assholes were that looked at you that way and I'll fire them on the spot" naningkit ang mga mata niya, unti-unting dumilim ang aura.

Nanlaki ang mata ko.

"Tangina talaga," bulong ko sa sarili. "Oo na! Hindi na ako lalayo. Hindi ko na uulitin. Sabay na tayo palagi, okay?"

His lips twitche, like he's avoiding to smile para lang mapanatili ang kanyang lethal, cold, intimidating alpha image.

Pag-*ding* ng elevator, this time I didn't walk fast. Natuto na, girl.
He gently held my elbow, caressing it slowly while we walked through the hallway... yes, that hallway na may tambak na nurse.

Pumikit ako saglit. Tangina ka talaga, Malrick.

We arrived at my station, They greeted the man behind me and eyed me intently. He simply nodded at them

"We'll eat lunch together in my office," he said. Tapos walang kaabog-abog, he kissed my head. Like that's just normal.

Bumalik siya sa elevator, calm and deadly as ever, habang ako naiwan sa hallway na parang nilamig ang buong spinal cord ko.

Ang mga nurse? Lahat nagulat. Lahat nagtitig. Pero sabay-sabay din na nag-kunwaring busy. Biglang may nagtype sa walang keyboard, may nag-staple sa hangin.

"Gumuho ka na lang, Solana," I whispered to myself. Sa sobrang sama ng tingin nila

In the middle of my shift, habang nagsusulat ako ng report, may tumawag. Di ko na chineck kung sino , sobrang busy ko. I just sandwiched my phone between my ear and shoulder.

"Hello?" multitasking level 100 ako.

"Baby." KINGINA. Para siyang nahihirapan huminga.

"Ano?" I asked, trying not to sound affected.

"Come hre to my office..."
"I want to hug you." that voice. That *deep, low, tempting voice*.

Disoras ng trabaho Malrick! Pinatayan ko siya ng tawag

I lost words. Namumulaa mukha ko

" Are you okay Nurse Suarez?" Nurse Cristina asked as she walk towards me

"Po? Ah—yes po, mainit lang po siguro," mabilis kong sagot habang pilit kong tinatakpan ang namumulang mukha ko.

"Mainit? Eh ang lamig kaya ng aircon dito, Nurse." Napakunot-noo siya.

Napakagat ako sa labi

"Ahh...baka po kabado lang. Ang dami rin po kasing kailangang gawin," palusot ko habang dinampot ko agad 'yung clipboard ko.

She gave me a confused nod, then placed a folder on my desk.

"Anyways, ito ang report na dapat mong tapusin before 3."

"Yes po, salamat po"I smiled politely.

I crave for fishball kaya lumabas ako during lunch. Hindi ko mahagilap sina Ericka at Simon lately, kaya lumabas ako mag-isa.

Habang naglalakad papunta sa paborito kong fishball stand sa kanto, ramdam ko agad ang gutom. Tangina, ilang araw ko na 'tong pinaglilihian. I was waiting for my fishball kasi pina-init ko pa. Habang inaayos ni kuya 'yung sticks, biglang tumunog ang phone ko. Kinuha ko ito mula sa bulsa

Dr. Demirian calling...

Tiningnan ko lang. Binalik ko 'yung cellphone sa bulsa.

Minutes after. Nang iniabot na sa akin ang fishball at kukuha na sana ako ng suka, may tumikhim sa likod.Putangina. Deja vu ba 'to?

Dahan-dahan akong lumingon, handang umatake kung si Malrick na naman 'to. Pero hindi, si Erickson. Nakatayo siya roon, formal pa rin, pero parang naiilang.

"Ma'am Solana... pinapahanap po kayo ni Doc." Tangina talaga. Kahit sa fishball stand may tracker ako.

Inangat ko 'yung stick ng fishball at ngumiti nang mapait.

"Paki-sabi... gusto kong kumain ng fishball ngayon.Hindi muna ako sasabay" sabi ko sabay kain ng fishball.

He froze but hesitantly nodded. Lumayo siya at parang may kausap... *sa earpiece?*

Napansin kong naglilibot pa ang mata niya habang nagsasalita, para bang dinidescribe ang lugar—like he's telling someone exactly where I am.

Tsk. Bahala kayo d'yan.

Naka-tatlong fishball palang ako nang may papalapit dito. Tumawid sa kalsada.

I eyed Erickson. He was surprised but still managed to keep his cool. Suddenly, he looked interested in the cars passing by, as if there was a fistfight happening in the middle of the road. Si Malrick pala ang kausap niya kanina.

Pumikit ako. Deep sigh. I silently curse.

Malrick. Still wearing his pristine doctor coat. Parang nawawala sa lugar, pero confident pa rin.

"You're craving for this?" he asked, eyeing the fishball cart and the surroundings like he was spotting a biohazard zone.

Tangina, para bang may nakita siyang ebola sa mantika. I just nodded, may fishball pa kasi akong nginunguya.

He leaned down closer, enough for me and Manong to hear.

"Is this even safe to eat?" Nanlaki ang mata ko.

Then I stepped on his polished leather shoes. Damn Hard. Diniin ko pa talaga kasi alam kong matibay 'yan. Kaya ko.

"Aww—what was that for?"he even frowned

"Doc, safe na safe po ito. Marami pong kumakain nito. Baka nga mas malinis pa ito sa loob ng hospital," Manong said sweetly. I just nodded to support him.

I glanced at Malrick at ngumiti ako, pero ang ngiti ko, puno ng babala.

"Pasensya na po, Manong," sabi ko habang pilit ngumingiti. Tumango lang si Manong at muling ibinaling ang pansin sa mga niluluto niyang fishball.

Habang ngumunguya ako, naramdaman kong tila may sinusunog sa tagiliran ko. Si Dr. Demirian—nakasuot pa rin ng lab coat, naka-cross arms, at literal na tinutunaw ako sa tingin.

He's just waiting beside me, eyeing me like I was eating a deep-sea alien specimen instead of fishballs.

"Kung maka-tingin ka akala mo naman deep-sea alien kinain ko," bulong ko habang patuloy sa pagkain. So an idea popped into my mind, I took one fishball, skewered it on a stick, then held it in front of his mouth.

"Buka mo," I said, smirking. At first, he looked hesitant, eyebrows pulled together, lips tight—but then, slowly, he opened his mouth. Susunod din naman pala. I put it in.

He frowned. Hard.Reallt hard. Pero gwapo pa rin. Tanginang mukha yan, kahit nakasimangot, nakakainis na nakakaakit.

"That's hot," he muttered, his forehead slightly creasing.

"Masarap?" I teased, raising both my eyebrows. He just nodded, lips pursed like he was trying not to admit it out loud.

Nahiya pa, ke laking tao.

So this time, I blew on the next one, tatlong beses pa para kunyari may effort kahit hindi naman ganun ka-init, then gently held it up to his lips again. He bit it. Slowly. Like it was a crime.

After that strange but strangely cute moment, we went back to the hospital. The afternoon shift was in full swing and I returned to my station.

Nagsusulat ako ng report nang biglang tinawag ako ng kalikasan. I grabbed my ID and bolted toward the nearest restroom, praying no one saw the way I sprinted like I was escaping a code blue.

Nang nasa cubicle na ako, mayapang umihi nang, pumikit pa

"Hmmm..." I heard.
"Ahhh..." another one. Parang nahihirapan.

I froze and panicked, baka may manganganak? Kaya dali-dali akong lumabas sa cubicle at tinadyakan ang kanila.

I froze at what I saw. Nalaglag ang panga ko sa eksenang bumungad sa'kin—gusto kong sumigaw, pero ni boses ko, nagtago sa lalamunan ko!

PUTANGINA!!

K. Bye.

Bahala kayong ma comatose kakaisip HAHAHAAH

AUTOR'S NOTE:

Hello! I'm just a newbie writer, but I promise to give you the quality stories you deserve. 💖
Thank you so much for your support — every read, comment, vote, and share means the world to me!
It truly encourages me to write more stories and keep going on this journey.
Please continue supporting me — I hope my stories touch your heart. ✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 21

I froze on what I see. PUTANGINA!!

Simon was sitting on the closed bowl... and Ericka? Nasa kandungan niya, nakaupo, parang wala sa ospital kundi sa sariling mundo nila. Ericka's eyes went wide as dinner plates. She scrambled to close her polo buttons.

I slammed the cubicle door shut out of panic.

"SORRY! Wala akong nakita! Ituloy n'yo lang!" I blurted like a robot in panic mode. Anak ng... Binata na nga si Simon. Hindi ko alam kung matatawa ako, maiiyak, o maglilinis ng mata sa alcohol.

At sa cubicle pa talaga ng ospital? SIMON? Talaga?Kaya pala hindi ko kayo mahagilap, naglaplapan na pala kayo.

I walked down the hallway in a daze, parang hinipan ng hangin ang kaluluwa ko palabas ng katawan. Lutang. Parang multo.

Pagdating ko sa station, kunwari kalmado ako. Mayapa akong nagta-type. No Malrick in sight. Wala man lang nagparamdam. Busy yata.

Interns were told to clock out early, around 3 PM. I quickly gathered my things, fixed my hair sa salamin, at lumabas ng ospital. Paglabas ko, I smiled at Manong Guard. Pero nanlaki mata niya, parang nakita niya 'yung ng may-ari ng ospital.

Then, ngumiti rin siya. Weird. Hindi naman siya ganito dati.And stilwala pa rin si Malrick. Walang text, walang tawag, walang paramdam. Mapait akong napangiti.

Dumating ako sa resto ng 3:15pm nag time in nalang ako ng maaga, hindi pa ako nakakahinga, busy na agad.

I was walking toward Table 7, where three classy-looking girls were waiting

"Good evening, Ma'am. May I take your order?" I said with my sweetest smile kahit pagod na ako.

"I'll just have..." Tumigil siya. Hawak ang menu

"Uhm... grilled salmon with mashed potatoes. Medium well, no butter, extra lemon on the " I nodded and wrote it down. Simple. Clear.

"How about you po—" I was about to ask the second girl, when the one in pink suddenly turned to her friend.

"Girl, was your IG post really true?"
"Which post are you talking about?"
"Duh? You and Dr. Demirian kissing? In a club?"

Demirian?
Napahinto ako. My chest tightened. No. Baka ibang Demirian 'yon... Maybe a cousin?

Then the third girl spoke, laughing, confirming everything like it was just tea.
"What? Malrick Virrelus Valtar Demirian and you kissed?" That name hit me like a slap.

My ears rang. The noise around me disappeared. I stood there, still holding my notepad, but I couldn't hear anything anymore.

Malrick?

The same Malrick who told me he hated loud places. Who looked me in the eyes and told me I was enough. He kiss her with the same mouth he used to say hes inlove with me?

I couldn't breathe properly. I blinked, but the tears blurred my vision anyway. I bit my lip to stop it from trembling, but my hands shook.

Still, I smiled. Weak. Almost invisible.

"I'll take your order in a minute," I whispered, barely getting the words out.
Then I turned around slowly, forcing my legs to move.

I don't know how I got through the rest of my shift. All I remember was the sound of her voice, laughing while she talked about the kiss.

All I remember was the way his name felt different now. Heavy. Cold.

I asked Albert again if I could ride with him.
Luckily, he said yes.

Ayoko siyang makita. Ayoko muna. Hindi ko kakayanin.

I hurried into my apartment and closed the door behind me. The second it clicked shut, I broke. I dropped everything, my bag, my keys, my pride and cried.

This pain... it feels so foreign. It wasn't just heartbreak. It was betrayal wrapped in silence.

Is this why he was gone today? Is this why he didn't show up? Was he with her... the whole time? I hugged myself tighter, sliding down to the floor as my sobs grew louder.

I let my guard down.Compared to those girls—

Their beauty, their confidence, their world—

I was nothing.
Nothing. I let my walls fall just so he could climb in...

Compared to those girls,
Their beauty, their confidence, their world—I was nothing. Nothing.

I didn't know how long I sat there, gasping between sobs, shaking. Then, a knock. My heart stopped.

"Solana... I know you're still not sleeping. Open up, baby." His voice.

The same voice that used to calm me... now feels like a knife.

But I stayed still. I didn't move. I didn't speak.

No, Malrick. Hindi pwede. Hindi tayo pwede. I pressed my hand over my mouth, trying to silence the sound building in my throat. Ayoko. Ayokong marinig niya kung gaano ako nasasaktan.

He knocked again, louder this time. But I stayed still. I didn't move. I didn't speak.

Maybe he left. Maybe he finally gave up.

I let out a shaky breath and slowly sat down on the floor again, my back against the bed. I hugged my knees to my chest and cried quietly.

No words. Just pain. But then, I froze. The doorknob twisted.

And before I could react, the door opened... revealing the one person I never wanted to see tonight.

Malrick. The reason I was falling apart. Napahagulhol ulit ako, helpless and tired.....Erickson. He was there, too. But he left almost immediately—maybe he already knew.

Malrick stepped inside, slowly walking toward me.

"H-hey... is everything okay?" His voice was soft. Careful. Too careful. Like he knew he was the one who broke me.

I shook my head, eyes filled with tears.

"No... d-diyan ka lang. Wag kang l-lalapit sa'kin." My voice cracked, but I meant every word.

But he took a step forward.

"Sabi ko, wag kang lalapit!" This time, I raised my voice. I wanted him to feel it, the panic, the heartbreak, the wall I was forcing to rebuild.

But he didn't stop. He closed the door behind him. Locked it. And then, without another word, he rushed to me. Before I could fight back, he scooped me up, bridal style, as if I wasn't breaking inside. As if this was normal.

He sat down on my bed and placed me gently on his lap.

I struggled. Nagpumiglas ako. But his grip tightened, not in a way that hurt me, but in a way that begged me to stay still.

"What happened, baby?" his voice was low, pleading.
"Can you please tell me? What did I do?"

What did you do? The words echoed in my head like a cruel joke.

"Ang k-kapal ng mukha mong magtanong ng ganyan, na parang wala kang ginawang m-masama, Malrick." My voice was low but firm, every word heavy with pain.

His eyes flickered. Nasaktan siya. But it was nothing compared to what I felt.

"Umalis ka na. Bumalik ka na sa babae mo. Gago ka." My voice cracked at the end as I broke again, hiding my face in my hands

I was sitting sideways on his lap, still trying to pull away, but he gently combed my hair with his fingers. A soft, familiar gesture.

"Baby... damn. I don't have any other woman." he whispered.

"S-sinungaling." I choked on my words, another sob escaping.
But he wiped my tears with his thumb, slow and tender, like it meant something.

"S-sabi ng babae sa resto... may video ka. Kahalikan mo 'yung isang babae."
I swallowed hard. The words burned in my throat.
"Kaya please... umalis ka na. Wag mo na akong guluhin." I looked at him through blurred vision.

"If you see me anywhere... pretend you don't know me." He froze.

"just act like I never existed. Please" My voice was flat, almost a whisper.
"Because from this day on... I'll try to forget you too" I took a breath, deep and trembling.

The room felt cold. Empty. But heavy. Then suddenly, he pulled out his phone.

"Erickson... fucking trace that video, the one where I'm kissing someone. Have someone check if it's edited or not. Do it now." His tone was sharp, controlled, but burning with frustration..

And then, he ended the call, just like that.

He sighed. I felt it, the slight tightening of his jaw. He was trying to hold something back. Then, slowly, he leaned in and pressed a soft kiss on my head. He stayed there for a few seconds, just breathing me in, before wrapping his arms tighter around me.

"Baby..." his voice was low, almost shaking.
"I may have been a womanizer... ruthless even, to all the girls before I met you. I admit it." I glanced up at him. He looked like he was struggling to speak. Like every word came from somewhere deep.

"I swear to God... I stopped the moment I decided to pursue you."

Silence. But the kind that meant everything.

"Goddamn, I'll cut off my own finger if I ever do that to you." His eyes were red now. Holding something .....Fear? Love?

He cupped my face gently, making me look at him. His touch was

trembling, but firm.

"I like you—hell, I'm fucking so in love with you." I gasped softly, stunned.

Then he leaned in, and kissed me, slowly, deeply. Not rushed. Not desperate. Just real. Romantic. Like he meant every second of it.

His hand was caressing my waist, while the other rested at the back of my head, gently pulling me closer.

When he sucked on my tongue, I squeezed my eyes shut, *lost in the moment*

Knock.

"Mr. Demirian?" Napamulat ako. My eyes went wide. i pushed him a bit.

Malrick reached over to the door and unlocked it, it wasn't far anyway, since my bed was right near it. The door opened.

Erickson.

He stepped in casually, catching us in that intimate position... but not reacting at all. As if it was normal.

I panicked, instinctively trying to move away, but Malrick held me tighter.
So instead, I buried my face into his neck. Nagtagong parang bata.

Tangina, Demirian! Nakakahiya.

But Erickson, ever the professional, simply walked in and handed over a folder.

Inside were files. Screenshots. Evidence.

Malrick's jaw clenched as he reviewed the files, his eyes darkening with every second. He explained it all to me, calmly but with fire in his voice, like we were in a lab dissecting a body, breaking down every detail of the fake video.

I stared at the clip on his phone. Kung hindi expert ang manonood, they'd believe it. It looked real. Too real. But it wasn't. It wasn't him.

Erickson gave a small nod, then left as fast as he arrived, probably

waiting in the car. How the hell does he do things that fast?

"I can't leave you here like this. I might go crazy. Please, baby... come with me." Malrick turned to me again, his eyes softer now.

Wala na akong energy para sa drama. No more pride. Just tiredness, and maybe relief. I simply nodded. I stood up slowly and reached for my black jacket hanging on the chair.

I glanced at the clock on my wall. 10:00 PM. And just like that... I was walking out the door, not sure where I was heading, but finally letting myself believe, Maybe he really chose me.

We finally stepped out. Malrick was the last to leave, of course.He double-checked the lock. Then checked it again. And again.

As if may mananakaw pa sa loob ng apartment ko.

Ang arte talaga.

After what felt like the tenth time checking the knob, he finally seemed satisfied. He turned to me, reached for my hand, and held it tightly.

I immediately spotted his car.I squinted at it. This time, it was a sleek black Lamborghini parked right outside.

Walang basag na salamin? Kumpleto ang gulong? I almost laughed to myself, then I remembered. Erickson. His bodyguard. Kaya pala buo pa ang sasakyan.

I looked around, expecting to see him somewhere leaning on a wall or parked nearby. But there was no sign of him.

As Malrick walked ahead to open the car door for me, I finally asked —

"Si Erickson?" I glanced around again, just to be sure. Baka naman na-kidnap na 'yun ng mga tambay dito.

"Why are you always mentioning his name?" he asked, brows slightly furrowed.

Napapikit ako. Napakaarte talaga.

"Kasi hindi ko siya nakikita sa paligid," I muttered, arms crossed. He motioned for me to get inside the car, so I did. Tahimik lang. Wala

akong gana makipagtalo.

He walked around and got into the driver's seat, then quietly maneuvered the car out of the narrow street.

I glanced at him, waiting. Expecting a real answer. He finally spoke, his jaw a little tight

"He's just everywhere. Don't worry too much, he can handle himself, Solana. And stop talking about him." Nagkasalubong ang kilay niya, and I could feel a bit of irritation in his tone.

I pouted. Baliw

"Stop pouting," he said without looking at me, "I might pull the car over and kiss you."

"Gago ka talaga!" My eyes widened. And I smacked his arm, half annoyed, half trying not to smile.

Apakasaya naman! lagyan ko kaya ng Cancer si Doc! hoyyyyyyy hindi pwede hahahahaha

AUTOR'S NOTE:

Hello! I'm just a newbie writer, but I promise to give you the quality stories you deserve. 💖
Thank you so much for your support — every read, comment, vote, and share means the world to me!
It truly encourages me to write more stories and keep going on this journey.
Please continue supporting me — I hope my stories touch your heart. ✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 22

He laughed, hard at my reaction.

"What? I don't joke around, Solana. You know that." He shot me a smirk, and despite myself... I smiled, nakakainis... pero nakakatuwa.

"Nasaan ka buong araw?" I asked, trying to sound casual. But he caught on quickly. He raised an eyebrow, the corner of his lips twitching.

"You missed me?" There was amusement in his eyes.

Baliw talaga.

"Bahala ka nga diyan." I muttered and turned my gaze out the window, pretending I didn't want an answer.

He laughed again, louder this time, as if enjoying how easy it was to fluster me

"Baby," he said softly, placing his hand on my thigh. I didn't push it away. Gusto ko, baliw na rin yata ako.

"I went to St. Antara. The province where my grandparents live." He paused.

"I told them about you." Nanlaki ang mata ko.

Tangina?

"Gago ka ba?" I blurted out, completely caught off guard. My brain couldn't even process what he just said.

"I'm dead serious, baby." He didn't even flinch.

"Bakit mo naman ginawa 'yon?" I asked, eyed almost in disbelief.

"And why not?" he said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. He looked at me, calm. Sure.

"Malrick... tangina ka talaga." I groaned, running a hand down my face.vvBut he wasn't done.

"We're going there tomorrow, actually." This time, I froze. I stared at

him. I wanted to jump out of the moving car. Or maybe vanish.

"Hey, come on. Don't be scared," he teased, glancing at me with a grin. "My grandpa doesn't bite... but my grandma does." Nanlaki na naman ang mata ko.

"Tarantado ka!" I said, then gave him a light punch on the arm.

He just laughed, not even flinching.

"Wag ka nga." I muttered, crossing my arms and looking out the window trying to hide the nervous flutter building in my chest.

But he just kept smiling like he'd already won.

After a few minutes of arguing about nonsense, I noticed the skyline changing.
Tall buildings rose around us like giants, glowing under the city lights. We stopped at the entrance of one—"VALTAR GRAND
SUITES." Tangina. Luxury practically oozed from its golden letters.

Malrick stepped out first and opened the door for me like it was the most natural thing in the world. I got out, still staring at the entrance like I didn't belong here. Parang ibang mundo 'to. Parang hindi ako para dito.

He tossed his keys to the valet without a word, then placed his hand on my waist as we walked inside. The lobby was all marble, gold trim, and modern chandelier. Baka bawal tsinelas dito?

People greeted him left and righreceptionists, security, even guests. If they could kiss the ground he walked on, they probably would. He just nodded at them all. Cool. Calm. Untouchable.

We entered the elevator. He pressed the button to the topmost floor, **P.** He kissed the top of my head gently while I glanced at our reflection on the polished steel doors.

And suddenly... nalungkot ako. Malayong-malayo siya sa akin. He looked like he belonged here polished, powerful, perfect. And me? I looked like someone just passing through. Someone out of place.

"Sayo itong building?" I asked, trying to sound casual.

"No. It's Grandpa's." He shrugged, " So it's his. He's the heir.

Without another word, he pulled me closer from behind and hugged

me.
Tight. And kissed my head again like he was trying to convince me I belonged there with him. Hulog na hulog , Doc?

I didn't even realize how deep I was already drowning.

Then the elevator doors opened. And damn.

The penthouse.

It screamed power. Dominance. Cold control.

The living room stretched wide with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that displayed the entire city like a private kingdom. A massive, matte black L-shaped leather sofa sat in the middle, perfectly placed on a dark grey rug. The coffee table was steel and glass sharp edges, no softness.

Sharp. Clean. Masculine. Ruthless.

The walls were painted in shades of gunmetal and deep navy. The lighting was dim, casting elegant shadows over the chrome-and-black open kitchen in the far corner. In the corner, a bar cart stood like a quiet flex, lined with bottles of expensive whiskey, gin, and wine I couldn't pronounce.

To the right, a floating staircase curved upward, framed in black steel with glass sides. You could tell it led to something more private, probably his room or office.

Sharp. Clean. Masculine. Ruthless. Just like him.

As I stood there, staring at the quiet city through the glass, I suddenly felt arms wrap around me from behind.

A warm hug. He pressed a kiss to my forehead... then gently leaned in, inhaling against my neck like it was something he'd missed all day.

"My favorite part," he murmured hoarsely.I tilted my head slightly, giving him access. I didn't know what to say, his lips brushing softly over my skin.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked, his mouth still grazing my neck. "Water? Coffee?" But he kept kissing. Smiling against my skin like this moment was his peace.

Napapikit ako. Not from shock, just from how it felt. Quiet. Intimate, comforting.

"Tubig na lang," I whispered, barely trusting my voice.

"Come on."He took my hand and led me to the kitchen area, guiding me to sit on one of the bar stools.

He moved around like he owned the place, which, he kinda did. I watched him pour cold water into a glass, his movements precise. Controlled. Then he turned and walked back to me, placing the glass gently in front of me.

I took it and drank slowly, feeling the cold ease the heat on my face. He sat down on the stool right in front of me, eyes not leaving mine.

"You're so beautiful, baby," he said quietly, like he saw something in me I didn't even know I had.

There was fire in his eyes. Putangina.

"Wala akong barya ngayon, gago ka," I muttered, trying to break the tension.

He chuckled and pulled me into a hug, tight and warm.

"Namimihasa ka na, Doc. Delikado na 'yan." I looked up at him, teasing. He leaned down, expression shifting.Still soft. But serious.

"Why? You don't like it when I touch you?" he asked, voice low. I blinked.

"Uh... gusto naman," I mumbled, looking away, suddenly very interested in the empty glass in my hand.

Before I could react, he gently cupped my face, turning it so I had no choice but to face him. His eyes studied mine for a second. Quiet. Then his eyes dropped to my lips. He parted his lips, tongue lick over his bottom lip

And he crushed his lips to mine like he'd been waiting too long

He pulled away, just enough to breathe. Then he stood up, his hands sliding down my waist as he gently lifted me and placed me on the counter barlike I weighed nothing. His face hovered close.

"Part your lips, baby," he whispered, his voice rough and low.

And then, he kissed me again. Harder this time. His tongue pressed against my lips, demanding for an entrance, and I gave in. I parted my lips.

God.Napapikit ako. My hands found his shoulders, holding on tight as the heat rushed through me.

His grip on my waist tightened, like letting go wasn't even an option. Like he needed me. Right here. Right now. Like this was more than just a kiss.

I didn't even realize what was happening, until I looked down.

My top and bra... gone. My breath caught. Expert ang gago.

And there he was. His lips pressed against my chest, warm and slow t*oo* slow. He kissed and sucked my right breast while massaging the other one.

"Ahhh..." I couldn't help the sound that slipped past my lips I clutched at his hair, and instead of pushing him away...I pulled him closer.

"M-Malrick..." I whispered, breath shaking. He looked up at me, his eyes dark with something deep something I couldn't name.

"M-Malrick..." I breathed, my voice catching in my throat.

My eyes widened when he looked up at me as kissed my breast and sucked alternately,

"That's it, baby... say my name." He smirked , voice low and thick.

He lifted me again, at kusa namang pumulupot ang dalawang binti ko sa bewang niya.
His hand squeezed my butt, and I felt it, ramdam na ramdam ko ang malaking bukol niya. God... Patuloy pa rin siyang humahalik, gigil na gigil, habang buhat pa rin ako paakyat sa kwarto.

He laid me down gently on my bed, eyes never leaving mine.

Pinindot niya ang bukol niya sa gitna ng mga hita ko habang ang halik niya ay bumaba,
From my neck, pababa sa dibdib ko, sinipsip iyon ng buong sabik,
Then down to my stomach, leaving a trail of heat with every kiss.

I widened my eyes nang isa-isang tanggalin niya ang butones ng jeans ko. Then he slowly pulled down my black panty. Napapikit ako nang

mariin.

Tangina. Nakakahiya.

"Fucking beautiful," he whispered. Pagdilat ko, nakatitig siya sa pinaka-pribado kong parte, para bang wala siyang ibang gustong makita kundi yun lang.

He gently parted it, halos dahan-dahan pa, Pero agad akong umiling, nanginginig pa sa kaba at hiya.

"Baby, don't—damn! It's fucking beautiful," he said hoarsely, voice low and trembling with desire. Napapikit ako nang mahigpit, letting him do what he wanted, kahit nanginginig ako sa kaba.

He kissed it lightly... At first. Napakapit ako sa bedsheet, halos mapunit sa higpit ng hawak ko.

Then he used his hand to part its folds
At nang maramdaman ko ang dila niya... Tangina. Parang may kuryenteng dumaloy sa buong katawan ko.

He licked me from the lower part paakyat his tongue swirling around the crown, mabagal pero nakakabaliw.

"Tangina... ahhh," I gasped, my moans escaping before I could stop them. Paulit-ulit na lang ang mura ko, hindi ko na mapigilan. All I could do was moan loud, needy, desperate.

I closed my legs slightly nang maramdaman ko ang dulo ng daliri niyang pumasok. He paused, ramdam kong tinitingnan niya ako With love... and with so much lust in his eyes.

Hinalikan niya ang noo ko, tapos sa tungki ng ilong ko, dahan-dahan.

"I love you so much, baby... so fucking damn much." His voice cracked, full of longing and fire all at once.

I closed my eyes and gave a small nod. "Mahal din kita," I whispered. Pagdilat ko, tiningnan ko siya, punô ng pagmamahal ang tingin ko.

He froze for a second, then kissed me hard, Tangina**.** I could taste myself on his lips. The kiss was deep, wild... But I gasped when he suddenly slid one finger inside. His eyes locked on mine, watching every reaction, as he moved his finger slowly.

My mouth formed a soft "**O**" ,then he added another, and this time,

moved faster. Masakit , pero nilamon iyon ng sarap.

"Ahhhhhh... M-Malrick, please..." Tumirik ang mata ko at napaliyad.

I reached for his hand down there, trying to slow him down, but this brute... he only moved faster, deeper, like he couldn't get enough of me.

Okay pa ba kayo? heheheh

Anyways thank you very much sa mga nag comment @cessesa08 @augustaurelia. Thankiess

AUTOR'S NOTE:

Hello! I'm just a newbie writer, but I promise to give you the quality stories you deserve. 💖
Thank you so much for your support — every read, comment, vote, and share means the world to me!
It truly encourages me to write more stories and keep going on this journey.
Please continue supporting me — I hope my stories touch your heart. ✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 23 SPG

SPG

"Ahhh! Please... M-Malrick, Im near" I gasped, voice trembling. I'm close. Oh God, I'm so close...

"Fuck... give it to me, baby," he growled. He lowered himself, still fingering me, habang sinisipsip niya ako nang mas madiin. Then he bit the crown, lightly but enough to send me over the edge.

"Ahhhhhh!" Napaliyad ako at napasigaw sa sobrang sarap. Hingal na hingal akong napapikit, trying to catch my breath. But then I heard him say,

"We're not yet done, baby. Don't sleep yet." Dumilat ako, sakto sa paghila niya ng shirt niya mula sa likod.

Tangina... ako, nakabukaka na. Siya? Fully dressed pa rin?!

I watched, biting my lip, as he unbuckled his pants. Kitang-kita ko ang pag-flex ng muscles niya habang tinatanggal ang sinturon, And when his pants dropped, naiwan ang black briefs na may nakabalandrang Calvin Klein logo.

I gasped as he slid it down,and his dick sprang free like a cobra, proud and demanding.
He stroked it lightly, teasing himself. Napapikit ako .

Hindi na Kahirapan ang papatay sa akin... kundi itong nasa harapan

I opened my eyes and eyed him, my heart racing, body trembling .I eyed him.

From his eyes ,full of love, care, and raw lust
down to his toned shoulders, abs... and that down there. Tangina. May galit yata sa akin.

He gently parted my legs, then positioned himself above me. He kissed me hard, and I responded without hesitation. I could feel his dick gliding against me, teasing, tempting.
His hands cupped my breast and massaged it making me moan uncontrollably.

"This might hurt big time, baby," he warned softly. I just nodded. Then he kissed me deeply, and as our lips met, he slowly pushed it in.

"Ahhhh... M-Malrick!" I moaned loudly almost a screama s the kiss broke. Ang sakit!!!!

A single tear escaped my eye.

"Goddamnit... so tight, baby. So fucking tight," he groaned, head thrown back, eyes shut
the veins on his neck and arms becoming more visible.

"I'm sorry, baby." Then he looked down at me, kissed my forehead gently, and whispered

Hinalikan niya ako sa tungki ng ilong punô ng pag-aalaga, na para bang ako na ang lahat sa buhay niya.

"I-it's okay." Talaga lang, Solana?

"N-Napasok na ba lahat?" I asked softly, as he gently kissed the tears from my cheeks.

"Not yet... only the head," he replied hoarsely. Halatang nahihirapan din siyang huwag gumalaw, giving me time to adjust to the pain.

Ulo? Ulo pa lang?!
Tangina. Hindi pa man ako nakaka-recover, bigla niya akong inatake ng halik—

"Ahhhhh! tangina ka, M-Malrick!" I cried out as he pushed it all in walang babala. Tears streamed down my face as I sobbed uncontrollably.

Ramdam kong punô na punô ako. parang umaabot hanggang matres ko...

"Fucking fuck... ahhhh,.....baby... so damn warm," napatingala siya, then slowly looked down—una sa mukha ko, tapos sa kung saan nagtatagpo ang mga katawan namin.

Klarong-klaro kasi naka-on ang ilaw. I looked down, too at namula ako. I was being so stretched... ramdam na ramdam ko.

"I love you so much, love. I fucking do." I was about to speak, when he move hard and fast.

"Fuck!" he cursed, his voice deep almost like a growl, wild and animalistic. Napakalmot ako sa likod niya, out of pain and shock.

Tangina. His movements became even faster.

"Ahhh... ahhh... M-Malrick... s-slow down..." I begged, our foreheads touching, breaths mixing.

Pero hindi siya huminto he just groaned and continued to fuck the hell out of me.

Umaalog ang kama nang malakas. Screams echoed in the room the pain was still there, but slowly... pleasure started to take over.

"M-Malrick... I'm coming... ahhh, I'm coming," I moaned, voice breaking with pleasure
but then, he suddenly stopped. He pulled out, walang babala.

"Turn around," he said, voice dark and commanding.

"H-huh?" I asked, still breathless, confused.

"Turn around, baby. Ass up." I was still trying to process what he said but he flipped me smoothly, like I weighed nothing... like I was just a piece of paper in his hands.

And then, he entered me from behind.

Napakagat ako sa bedsheet. Both hands gripping the covers tight as the pain shot through me again.

"PUTANGINA..... fuck this!" He cursed, moaned, and drove deeper. And all I could think was, God, it's so damn hot.

He spanked my ass and started moving faster ,ruthlessly

"Ahhh... M-Malrick... m-mahina lang sabi—ahhhh!"

"I can't get enough of you, baby... I fucking can't," he growled against my ear.

I'm near... I'm so near... Then he growled again and slammed harder—until we finally came, releasing everything deep inside me.

Napapikit ako at napadapa na lang sa kama, body completely spent from exhaustion.

But this damn brute didn't stop He stayed on my back, leaving soft kisses on my shoulders, head neck, like he still couldn't get enough.

"Baby... I'm still hard," he said hoarsely. Then he lifted one of my legs gently, and before I could say anything—

he entered me again ng naka dapa.

"Ahhh... Tangina ka talaga, M-Malrick!" I'm so tired. Hindi ko na kaya...masakit na
Pero kahit ganun, masarap pa rin. The pleasure still burned through my veins.

He slammed into me so hard, napapa-ungol ako sa lakas

Then he slid his hand down slowly tracing it until he reached my private part. He parted the folds and massaged it while moving so hard, driving me even crazier.

Ang ingay na namin, walang pakialam.

Tears started to fall.
Not from pain... but because the pleasure was just too much. Too overwhelming. Too deep.

After I came hard in that position, hinila niya ako paangat, my legs barely steady,
and brought me in front of the glass window, Kung saan kitang-kita ang city lights na kumikislap sa gabi.

He stood behind me, his chest warm against my back,
then leaned in and kissed my shoulder, slow, deep, and wanting. And without a word...

he entered me again. Again and again with each thrust,

I placed my hand on the glass for support, hingal na hingal, nanginginig ang tuhod ko , after we both came. He held me by the waist, pulling me close—steadying me.

I could feel his release , slowly running down my legs.

He kissed me on the lips, but I didn't even have the energy to respond. exhausted.
He chuckled softly and carried me in a bridal style back to the bed. Gently, he laid me down, careful, like I was something fragile.

Then he kissed me... sa noo, sa tungki ng ilong, at sa mga labi.

"I'm sorry for being ruthless, baby," he said hoarsely, his voice full of care and guilt.

I just hummed, eyes still closed. I didn't have the strength to say anything. I just wanted to sleep. Before I slipped into darkness, I felt him softly cleaning me. Then he dressed me, his boxer shorts and an oversized shirt, and we cuddled under the blanket.

It was almost 2 a.m. when I woke up with the need to pee.

Malrick was still sleeping soundly, arms wrapped tightly around me. His face was pressed between my breasts, parang doon siya huling tumigil bago makatulog, no wonder sore ang nipples ko.

Dahan-dahan kong inangat ang kamay niya. Akala ko magigising siya, pero hindi. Tulog pa rin, tahimik at mukhang payapa. And
damn. Even the slightest move sent pain through my legs.

I got out of bed slowly, one step at a time.

Masakit.
Masakit sa baba, masakit pati balakang ko. Parang binangga ako ng truck.

I got into the bathroom, and the moment I stepped in, it gave off luxury vibes, full-length mirror, a huge bathtub, and everything was super spacious. I walked slowly toward the toilet and sat down to pee.

But the moment it started napasigaw ako sa sakit. I had to cover my mouth with my hand,tears welling up in my eyes as I quietly sobbed while peeing.

So sore.
Tangina, Malrick! I was just about to flush the toilet when the door opened, and he walked in, hugging me tightly from behind

"I thought you left," he whispered, relief in his voice. I looked at him through the mirror in front of us. Walang saplot siyang ni isa. Parang wala lang 'yon sa kanya, at kitang-kita ko pa ang kanya, tayong-tayo. Tangina naman.

Then he started kissing my neck, slow, gentle.His lips trailed up until

they reached mine. I responded, kahit pagod na pagod pa ako. He broke the kiss and looked at me through the mirror, then slowly lifted the hem of the shirt I was wearing.

Napasinghap ako. My breasts were covered in kiss marks pulang-pula. He chuckled at my reaction.

"I'm sorry, baby... but I'm not really sorry." Napapikit na lang ako nang maramdaman kong dumudunggol ang matigas niyang alaga sa pagitan ng puwet ko.

"M-Malrick... masakit pa," I whispered, almost pleading. He just kissed my neck and hummed,

Buang talaga 'tong lalaking 'to.

"I'll be gentle this time,Baby. Don't worry."

Then he lifted both my legs, parang palaka akong nakabukaka sa harap ng salamin, at siya, nasa likod ko gripping me tightly. I placed my hand on the back of his head for support.

PUTANGINA, Solana. Napaka-rupok mo.

"Ahhh... Malrick... m-masakit!... ahhh!" I cried out as he pushed himself in, hard.

He began to move, slamming into me with power When I looked at the mirror, I saw it
how my soaked, stretched part welcomed him with every thrust. His eyes darkened as he watched it happen.

"Ohh hell... fuck!" he groaned, voice wild.

The pleasure was overwhelming I couldn't stop moaning, my body trembling as he gripped my legs tightly and slammed harder.

The sound of skin slapping echoed through the bathroom. And then we both came.

I clung to the mirror for support, breathless, shaking... completely ruined in the best way. Tangina.

I could barely think straight.He carried me back to the bed and entered me again this time, in missionary position. I don't even remember how I managed to respond.

All I knew was that at some point, after he took me in that position, and we finally decided to sleep. nakatalikod sa ako kanya, eyes heavy and body sore.

Then, nagulat na lang ako when I suddenly felt him enter me again this time, naka-tagilid kami.

God! Wala bang kapaguran 'tong taong 'to?

HAHAHA kamusta kayo habang nagbabasa nito? 😊 I hope you're enjoying the story so far!

Kung nagustuhan niyo po, baka puwede niyo namang i-share sa ibang tao — sa friends, classmates, o kahit sa crush niyo! 🤗

Who knows? Baka sila rin kiligin, matawa, o ma-addict sa kwento ko! 💖

Thank you so much for reading and supporting my stories. Love you all! 💕

#ShareTheKilig #SupportWattpadWriters

CHAPTER 24

I woke up dahil sa panginginig. I was shaking. Ang init-init ng katawan ko, pero I couldn't move-not even a bit.

Damn... anong nangyari sa'kin?

My head was heavy, my body sore all over. I blinked slowly, and from the corner of my eye, I noticed the room was already bright.

I blinked slowly and from the corner of my eye, I noticed the room was already bright. Umaga na

Malrick was on the balcony, galit na galit habang may kausap sa telepono. His voice was sharp, filled with anger, though I couldn't make out the words.

Bago ko pa man ma-process lahat... I drifted back to sleep- too weak, too hot, too tired.

I woke up when I felt someone softly caressing my hair. It was Malrick. I smiled at him, but he didn't smile back. His face looked tense-worried.

I glanced around the room and noticed two other people. One guy was sitting on the couch.
I think he's Malrick's best friend... I remember seeing him before, nung binisita niya si Malrick sa ospital.

And beside him-a girl. She sat close, and the guy's hand was on her waist. Maybe she's his girlfriend? When the girl noticed I was awake, she stood up and approached me with a warm smile.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Elira. You can just call me Elira," she said gently. Ang ganda niya. Elegant, calm, and professional.

She turned to the two men.

"Can you both step outside for a moment?" she asked kindly. Malrick looked hesitant-parang ayaw umalis- but eventually, he followed.

Now it was just the two of us.

"Okay, Solana," she began. "I'm an OB-GYN. I just need to ask you a few things, okay?" I just nodded.

"You're a virgin.. when Malrick took you?" I nodded slowly, hesitantly.

"And how many times did he take you?" She kept her tone calm but firm. I looked away, face burning, pero kahit nahihiya ako, nag-recall ako ng kaunti.

"Mga... w-walo po Dra.?" I whispered. She nodded slightly, as if she already expected that answer.

"They really are best friends..." she muttered under her breath, almost to herself. Then she sighed and looked me in the eye.

"Did you feel pain or discomfort during the activity?"

"Nung una lang po, Doktora... at sa mga huli pong pagkakataon ng pakikipagtalik"

"Did you use any lubrication products?"

"Hindi po Dra.. Wala po siyang ginamit." I said, my fingers tightening around the hem of my shirt. I couldn't look her in the eye. She nodded.

Then she sighed and looked me in the eye.

"Don't worry. Malrick will rot in hell for this." She handed me some medicines-for the pain, for the inflammation, and something else I didn't even recognize.

"You have lacerations, Solana. Internal tears. Malalim. Your body wasn't ready... you should've been given time." I bit my lip , lacerations?

"If anything feels off-fever, bleeding, more pain than usual-you can let me know. Okay?" I nodded again, still too overwhelmed to speak.

As she packed her things , she left the room, she looked back and said,

Nakatulog ulit ako. I only woke up when Malrick gently shook me awake.

"Baby, I know you want to sleep... pero kailangan mong kumain." I nodded weakly. He sighed and leaned in to kiss me-a long, warm kiss

on the forehead.

"M-Malrick..." I whispered. "May laceration daw ako, sabi ni Dra. Elira." He closed his eyes and massaged the bridge of his nose, clearly frustrated with himself.

Then he nodded slowly.
"Yes, baby. I know. I'm so sorry for being ruthless... I just-" He paused, then looked at me with guilt and longing.
"I just can't get enough of you." He lifted my hand and kissed it-mahaba, parang may halong pagsisisi. I gave him a small smile.

"Ayos lang... buhay pa naman ako," I teased softly, to ease his worrynies i dont wnat to to sad

He let out a short chuckle, but I could still see the worry in his eyes-

"Trabaho na bukas... hindi pa yata ako makalakad." I groaned softly. Ang sakit pa rin talaga.

"At ikaw? Paano 'yung trabaho mo?"

"Trabaho na bukas... hindi pa yata ako makalakad." I groaned softly. Ang sakit pa rin talaga.

"At ikaw? Paano 'yung trabaho mo?"

He smirked.
"You forgot that I'm the owner, baby. I can give you an A+ grade even if you just stay here in my penthouse."

"Yabang mo!" I rolled my eyes, but I couldn't stop the small smile forming on my lips.

Then it hit me-
"Diba sabi mo pupunta tayo ngayon sa grandparents mo?" I asked, suddenly worried. Baka nagaabang na 'yung lolo't lola niya, tapos ito, parang walang pake.

"Yeah, I already called them. Told them you're too tired because... we made love 'til morning." answered so casually,

I froze. Napasinghap ako. Anong klaseng paliwanag 'yon?!

"M-Malrick!" I whispered-shouted, covering my face in embarrassment.

"Please tell me you're just joking..." I said, half-hopeful, half-panicked. He tilted his head, smirking.

"You know I don't do jokes." His lips twitched, clearly fighting a laugh.

"Umalis ka sa harapan ko! Mabibinat ako sa'yo, Malrick!" I said dramatically. And just like that, parang bulkan, sumabog ang tawa niya, echoing all over the room.

We stayed in his penthouse for a whole week. Walang ginawa kundi kumain, manood ng movie, matulog, ulit-ulit lang. He still worked-pero doon lang sa office niya sa loob ng penthouse.
Multitasking king, pero clingy pa rin

Pagdating ng Sabado, I could finally walk properly again , so I decided to go home. Now here we are-me in the passenger seat, him driving like some mafia boss on a mission.

Naka-focus sa daan na parang may aambush.

"Hindi kasi talaga pwede na doon na lang ako palagi, Malrick..." I sighed heavily.

" why not? I told you-I can support you even if I don't work anymore." he said firmly

I turned to him, eyes wide.
"HINDI PWEDE 'YON! Anong 'bubuhayin mo ako'? Eh ni hindi mo pa nga ako jowa! Live-in kaagad? Gago ka ba?!" I burst out,

"I'll court you then. Every day. While you stay in my penthouse."
He said it so casually, like it was the most obvious solution.

Ligaw?Tangina.
Nauna pa ang sex kaysa sa ligaw?! Makukurot ako sa singit ni Mother Superior nito,

Nasa apartment na kami at si Malrick? Still grumpy as hell.

I was folding my clothes on the bed, habang siya naman ay nakaupo sa gilid, yakap-yakap ako sideways na parang bata.

"You sure you won't change your mind?" he mumbled, still clinging. Siniko ko siya. Tangina, ang tigas talaga ng ulo!

Pag nakita 'to ng mga empleyado niya-baka mag-wendang ang buong opisina!

"Umayos ka nga," I warned,
"pag ako napikon, videohan kita sa ganyang ayos tapos ibebenta ko sa hospital."

He chuckled, unbothered. Then leaned in and kissed the top of my head.

"Damn, baby... I'm so in love with you." he said, looking at me with so much love.

We were just talking, chilling, halikan paminsan-minsan sa leeg, when suddenly-a call came in. He ignored it.

"Sagutin mo," I said, lightly elbowing him.

"It's not important," he muttered, still busy making out with my neck like I was lunch.

"Baka important nga," I insisted.

"Then get it inside my pocket and answer it." He gave me that mischievous look. Parang batang masaya sa kalokohan niya.

I reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He chuckled when I slid my hand into his pocket-Baliw talaga,I just rolled my eyes.

It was Berto-his secretary.

"Dr. Demirian," I read out loud, then cleared my throat.

"H-Hello? Berto?" There was a long pause. Then a gasp.

"N-Nurse Solana??"

"Yes po. Ako nga ho 'to. "

"Ahhh, pasensya na po sa abala, Nurse. May... may scheduled surgery po si Doc ngayon-4 PM!"

I turned to look at Malrick, who was still hugging beside me He didn't even blink.

"Just transfer the patient to Dr. Falcon, Berto We're busy."

Napasinghap si Berto.

"A-Ah... sige po, Doc. I'll inform Doctor Falco-"

Before he could finish, sinabunutan ako ni Malrick ng konti-

"No, pupunta po siya, Berto. On the way na po." I said quickly habang nakatingin sa kanya.

Umiiling pa 'tong hayop sa tabi ko, parang ayaw pa rin tumigil kakadikit sa leeg ko.

"Uhh-okay po. Thank you, Nurse. I'll inform the staff," Berto replied, confused but relieved.

I dropped the call and eyed Malrick sharply. Pero ayun siya-nasa gilid ko pa rin, parang tuko, kakahalik at ka-amoy sa leeg ko.

"Tigang ka ba? Bakit ka ganyan?" I try my best not to get irritated.

He chuckled, eyes closed, clearly enjoying the moment.
"alis ka na. May surgery ka pa."

"Tsk," he clicked his tongue, pero lalo pang hinigpitan ang yakap niya.

"Pag hindi ka pumunta sa hospital..." I paused "...hindi kita sasagutin." Mabilis pa sa alas-kwatro siyang tumayo.

Naglinis lang ako ng apartment, namalengke ng kaunti, at dumalaw saglit sa ampunan.

Pagkauwi ko, 9 PM na. Kaya napagdesisyunan kong magluto ng pansit canton.

Kumalat agad ang amoy sa buong kwarto- ang bango, nakakagutom. I was just about to dig in nang------ May nag-text.

Dr. Demirian:
"Surgery's done, baby."

Me:
"Okay. Ingat sa pag-uwi."

I smiled a bit and started plating my pansit canton ng may kumatok.....

Tangina... kapag ito si Aling Krosana na naman to...

I sighed and walked to the door.

But no. Pagbukas ko-Dr. Demirian. Malrick

Mukhang pagod. He looked tired, so I didn't say anything anymore. A 6-hour operation is no joke.
Still handsome, though.

I opened the door wider.
"Pasok ka."

But then... Someone else came in. Erickson. May dala. Maleta.

M-maleta?!

"B-bakit may... maleta?" I asked Erickson

Erickson just gave me a polite smile. He walked in, closed the door gently,

So I eyed the man sitting on my bed- coz saan pa ba siya uupo? Wala naman akong sofa.

"Ano 'to, Malrick?" I asked, arms crossed, heart dangerously close to exploding. Alam ko na ang balak niya...Pero gusto kong marinig sa mismong bibig niya.

"I will live here, Solana," he said, while casually scanning my tiny apartment like he was mentally renovating it.
Subukan niya lang maglagay ng air fryer, Magwawala ako.

"Hindi nga pwede, Malrick! Hindi ka ba nakakaintindi?"I snapped, through gritted teeth.

"Why not? Ayaw mong tumira sa penthouse ko, so ako na lang ang titira sa apartment mo." He turned to me, calm as ever.

"Hindi pwede dahil dodoble ang renta ko pag dalawa tayo!" Pero parang may selective hearing siya, dahil naglakad lang siya papunta sa kama ko, binuksan ang maleta, at nagsimulang mag-ayos ng damit sa maliit kong cabinet.

Nag-crack pa 'yung kahoy nang pumwesto siya sa kama.

Tangina, parang gusto ko na siya itapon sa labas.habang inaayos ang mga polo at slacks niya,

"I already paid the landlord,baby. Two years advance."

Napamaang ako.

"P-ano?!" He looked at me, smug. I froze

"Baliw ka ba?" He blinked at me, confused.

"Why? Was it wrong? Should it be... five years in advance?" he said-dead serious.

"I'll just pay her tomorrow morning" He added.

I looked up at the ceiling as I breath deeply.

TANGINA. Tangina talaga.

---

nagka laceration, pa nga, ayaw kasi paawat si Doc HHAHAHAHAH

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 25 SPG

Alam kong wala na akong laban kay Malrick. Kaya tumalikod na lang ako at dumiretso sa table para kainin 'yung pansit canton ko.

Tahimik lang ako, noodles in mouth.

Then suddenly, I felt him hug me from behind. Sunod, isang halik sa tuktok ng ulo ko.

"Don't be angry," he whispered, voice softer than usual.
"I just... I just can't sleep in my penthouse without you. I'll go crazy, Solana."

Bakit parang ako 'yung nauubos dito? I just nodded slowly, still chewing.

He peeked over my shoulder to look at what I was eating, then frowned like pansit canton committed a crime.

Alam ko na agad kaya inunahan ko na.

"Don't you dare call Erick and command him to buy food."

"What? I didn't do anything—" he said, innocent

KNOCK KNOCK.

"Dr. Demirian?" Its Erickson.

Malrick opened the door. I didn't even look. I just heard it close again. Siguro umalis na si Erickson.

But then a bunch of red roses suddenly appeared sa harap ko.

Rosas. RED ROSES.

Pinigilan kong ngumiti. Lalaban tayo,
I looked up at him slowly.

"Ano 'to?"

"Don't ask the obvious," he smirked.

"Rosas?" I squinted. "Para kay Aling Krosana? Sige, ibibigay ko sa

kanya bukas." Habang subo pa rin ako ng pansit canton,

"Hell no," he replied fast. "that's for you, baby. I'm starting my courtship now"

Tangina. Maharot ang gago

After eating, we decided to sleep. Tangina. Ang liit ng higaan, para kaming sardinas.

"Wag ka ngang malikot," I hissed habang pilit kong kinakalmang sarili ko.
"Gusto ko matulog."

"It's so damn hot, baby," he groaned behind me.

"Edi bumalik ka sa penthouse mo. May aircon doon."
May electric fan naman dito. Oo, medyo maingay, parang may helicopter pero pwede na.

Akala ko lalabas na siya or what, pero hindi.

Nag-hubad lang siya bigla. Naiwan lang 'yung boxer niya.

Then humiga ulit sa tabi ko, at niyakap ako from behind, may pa-dantay pa ng paa.

"There. Much better without clothes," he whispered while sniffing my hair

"Chancing ka lang eh!" I snapped, pero nakangiti na ako, kahit ayokong ipahalata.

We peacefully slept that night, him hugging me from behind, lulled by a noisy ceiling fan.

But I woke up around 3 a.m. when I felt someone undressing me.

"M-Malrick, ano ba?" I mumbled, eyes still closed, too sleepy to function.

"Just one, baby," he whispered

Tangina naman. Pero mas tangina ako dahil nagpadala ako. I didn't protest when he slid off my cotton shorts and panty. I was still turned away from him when he kissed my shoulders and neck from behind, then gently lifted one of my legs and rested it on his torso.

Then I felt it—one finger... then two.

Napakatakip na lang ako ng bibig.
Tangina. Baka gising na si Aling Krosana, may live show na siyang madidinig. His fingers moved faster, and he teased the crown with his thumb. Damn.

"Arrghhhhhhhhmm..." I bit the pillow when he slowly entered.

"Fuck!" My eyes widened, and I hit him on the arm.

"H-hinaan mo. Hindi soundproof 'to," I warned. He just nodded and bit my shoulder. Tangina talaga.

His thrusts got faster and faster , then suddenly... a cracking sound.

Tangina. Sabay kaming natigilan. We stared at each other.

He pulled out and stood up. I saw him glistening, basa yung kanya.
Napapikit nalang ako

"Your bed cracked," he said, eyes on the broken bed leg

"Don't state the obvious," I mimicked him, rolling my eyes.

"Come on," he said, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the bed.

"H-huh?" I asked, Akala ko titigil na kami .....confused, but I still followed.

He guided me in front of my small mirror hanging on the wall.

I saw our reflection, both of us bare. He is behind me . He gently cupped my chest and massaged it, then lifted my chin and kissed me hard. I moaned into his mouth.

But the kiss broke when he pulled me closer from behind, entered me from behind. hard. Really hard and everything else melted away.

"Ahhh..." I gasped, gripping his arm as his movements deepened.

"Pasensya na, Aling Krosana," I muttered under my breath.
Mag-headset ka na lang muna

His pace quickened. I could see his focused expression in the mirror behind me. The moment was intense, raw. I placed my hands over my mouth, trying to silence my moans.

"Oh hell... f*ck," He said loudly, nanlaki ang mata ko
I tilted my head, trying to push him to my neck , he bit me gently to muffle my sound.

God, bakit ba kasi dito pa ?!

"I'm near... I'm f*cking near, baby," he breathed against my neck.
Damn. Vampire doctor.

"M-Malapit na rin a-ako," I whispered breathlessly. And just like that, he pulled my face up, holding me tightly, one hand gripping my waist, the other squeezed my breast

We reached that moment together. I scratched his arm from the overwhelming rush of pleasure as we moaned into each other's mouths.

He slowly broke the kiss, panting softly, and pressed a gentle kiss to my forehead.

We stayed like that for a while, me, staring at our reflection, and him, busy kissing my neck. I could feel his release trailing down my leg, but he didn't even bother pulling out.

And just like that, he started moving again, this time leaving one of my legs up. He even kept thrusting hard while we were walking toward the sink, yes, habang naglalakad kami! Diyos ko, hindi na siya naawa sa lababo ko!

"Ahhh w-wag dito, M-Malrick..." I pleaded as he kept thrusting hard from behind, and before I knew it, he placed me on the sink.
Buti na lang nalisan ko agad, kung hindi baka mangati ang pwet ko.

Damn this man—walang preno!

At sa lakas ng salpukan namin, mukhang hindi lang kama ang masisira... pati lababo ni Aling Krosana, delikado na. Pasensya na po, Aling Krosana .....hindi ito kasama sa warranty!

"Fuck, baby... you're so addicting. I can't get enough of you," he groaned. We came in that position

Akala ko tapos na, okay na, time to breathe. Pero hindi. Hindi pa pala!

I barely had time to recover when he sat on the stool like he owned the moment. His dick was still so hard and so strong Tangina ! wala

bang kapaguran 'yan?

"Come here. Fucking ride me, baby," he said, voice low and breathless. My legs still shaking, I climbed on top of him, heart pounding.

Akala ko wais ako. Pero for the first time in my life... na-scam ako. What I thought would be one round... turned into three .....Three rounds, walang warm-up, walang tubig, walang pahinga . Parang hinamon ng Olympics ang katawan ko!

Sorry po Aling Krosana, nadamay pa mga gamit mo HAHHAHAHAHAHAHA

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✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 26

We were inside his car, cruising smoothly down the road on our way to the mall, because, no matter how hard I tried to reason with him, argue with logic, or even guilt-trip him with dramatic lines, I could never win against this man.

"Sa palengke na lang kasi... mahal sa mall," I argued, arms crossed.

"Ng ilang sentimo, Solana." Napahinto ako. Okay. May punto siya.

"Nagtitipid ako, budgeted na pera ko, Malrick." He suddenly turned to me, brows furrowed, jaw clenching.

"Who the f*ck told you I'd let you pay? Are you insulting me?" Umiigting ang panga. Galit?

"Pag ikaw nagbayad, hindi kita sasagutin," I said, narrowing my eyes at him. A threat? Maybe.

"Subukan mo lang... I'll let my whole hospital go bankrupt." He glanced at me with deadly seriousness. Nanlaki ang mata ko. Tangina talaga!

"Baliw ka na talaga," I said, shaking my head

" hati na lang tayo," I said, trying to meet him halfway. He didn't reply. Tahimik. Pero mukhang okay na? I think?

"Narinig mo 'ko? Hati nga tayo," I repeated, poking his arm.
Still nothing. His jaw just clenched while his eyes stayed on the road.

"Ang drama mo, para kang bata," I said, arms crossed

He suddenly turned to me for a second, one brow raised.
"Solana, I'd gladly spend every last cent I have on you. And you're worried about me paying for the groceries?" he said, voice steady and low

Napasinghap ako.

"You think I care about the price of bread when you're the only thing I actually want?" He added.

Putek. Wala na. Talong-talo na naman ako.

Masasanay na lang siguro ako sa masamang tingin ng mga tao, para lang akong kasambahay niya. Naka-fitted white shirt ako na may maliit na heart sa gitna, black leggings, at Birkenstock-style sandals, 'yung imitation lang, inutang ko pa kay Aling Krosana.

Samantalang si Malrick ay naka-nude plain shirt with a small Calvin Klein logo sa gitna, black shorts, black leather watch, black cap, at branded sandals na halatang hindi galing sa ukay.

Pagpasok pa lang namin, napatingin na ang guard at ilang staff. Lalo na sa kanya, and greeted him politely
Tangina... don't tell me

"Sayo rin itong mall?" tanong ko, nanliliit ang mata.He glanced

"No. I'm just an investor," sabay hagod sa baywang ko na parang wala lang.

Tangina. Kahit saan ata ako magpunta, may kaugnayan sa pangalan niya. Hindi na ako magtataka kung balang araw bilhin na rin niya ang apartment ni Aling Krosana.

Napa-irap na lang ako habang hawak ang basket.

"Wag na kasi ito, mahal 'to," sabi ko habang binalik ang mamahaling noodles.
"Ito na lang—Quickchow," sabay pakita ng sachet na may faded label pero swak sa budget, trying to be as practical as possible.

"No, let's try this," he replied, casually picking up a pack of Nissin Premium Ramen—halatang imported. Tangina, P95 isang pack?

Pagdating namin sa meat section, bigla niyang kinuha ang steak cut na parang wala lang. Napaangat ang kilay ko sa presyo. ₱2,850 ang isang piraso, halos kalahati na ng budget ko para sa buong linggo. Ibabalik ko na sana...

"Why the hell would you put it back?" he asked, frowning as he blocked my hand.

"Hindi kailangan 'yon, tsaka mahal 'yon! Isang libo lang dala ko, Malrick!" .....He sighed, like I was the most stubborn person alive.

"I told you, I will pay for our groceries."

"Ayoko nga ng gano—" I tried to finish my sentence, but he cut me off and pulled out his phone like he was dialing someone.

"Grandpa, I'll resign from the hospital. Find someone else to manage it. I can't do this anymore—"

"Tangina, baliw ka talaga!" Nanlaki mata ko at agad ko siyang sinabunutan.

He just laughed, like a total lunatic. As if threatening to quit a whole hospital was some kind of love language. I turned around and saw all the staff nearby, frozen. Mouths open. Eyes wide. Nang makita nilang sinabunutan ko lang 'yung boss nila, napa-ngiti ako ng hilaw. Tangina talaga.

When we were done, we headed to the cashier. We kept arguing about the price, my mood was off, I wasn't even looking at him. But the whole time, Malrick's hand never left my waist, gently tracing circles like he was silently telling me to calm down.

"P-Pwede ko bang iba-ibahin 'yung bayad nito? Kahit ilang daan lang muna?"
I said softly, as I handed over only the essentials from our once-full cart.

The cashier froze. She looked at Malrick, clearly unsure what to do. Para siyang naholdap...Before she could even respond, the store manager came rushing to the counter with a rehearsed-but-nervous smile.

"Hi ma'am! We actually have a promo today. Free na po lahat ng items niyo. You don't have to pay anything!" Nanlaki ang mata ko.Totoo ba 'to? Free?

"P-promo po? Para saan po?"
I asked, gripping a sachet of shampoo like it was made of gold.

The manager glanced at Malrick, clearly panicking as if they were talking through brainwaves.

"A-ah... for the first lady po na mag babayad. The one wearing a... white shirt." She said it like even she was confused by the words coming out of her mouth.

Tumikhim lang si Malrick.

I smiled happiy inside First time ko maka-avail sa promo, Noon pa man, todo tipid na ako buy 1 take none, wait for sale, at minsan pa nga, tawad sa cashier kahit fixed price.

Ngayon? Libre ang lahat. Kahit isang daan lang ang natipid ko, ang feeling ko? Parang nanalo ako sa raffle sa barangay fiesta.

Hindi mawala ang ngiti ko habang lumalakad kami papunta sa kotse niya, dala-dala ang mga grocery bags at puso kong punong-puno ng ligaya. I smirked when I realized Malrick paid ₱20,000 for his groceries, and I didn't pay anything because of the promo. Napahagikhik ako sa isip ko.

"You look very happy," he said, his eyes full of love and softness, as if seeing me smile was the only thing that mattered to him right now.

"Wala... ang sarap pala sa feeling ng may promo." I just shrugged, still laughing inside.

When we were already in the car, on the way home, Malrick kept caressing my thighs.
One hand was on the wheel, and the other was on my leg. Sometimes, he'd even purposely brush against my private part.

"Malrick, mag-focus ka nga!" I snapped, giving his hand a quick smack

"I'm focusing, baby." He smirked, eyes still on the road but obviously not behaving.

"Sa pagda-drive, Malrick! Hindi sa ibang bagay!" I glared at him He just laughed

But he stopped laughing when his phone rang from the car dashboard. I looked at it.

Berto calling.....

May surgery ba siya? Pag nagloloko na naman 'to, sasapakin ko talaga siya.

"M-Malrick... si Berto tumatawag," I stuttered, especially as his hand started to wander again.

"Answer it, baby. I'm focusing," he said—as if! And he smirked like he

knew exactly what he was doing.

I sighed and picked up the call.

"Dr. Demirian'"

"H-hello, Berto?" Tumikhim siya, then I heard him take a sharp breath.

"Nurse Solana, I just want to inform Dr. Demirian that he has a lunch meeting at 12 PM."

I looked at the clock. 11:45. Tangina. This man.

"Tell him to cancel the meeting," Malrick said, gripping my thigh a little tighter.

"U-uhh... pupunta po siya. On the way na, actually." I eyed him angrily. I forced a smile kahit hindi ko kita si Berto

"Sige po, Nurse Solana. I'll inform Mr. Solavan now."

"Wag mong pinababayaan ang mga trabaho mo!" I snapped at Malrick after hanging up the call

"Tsk. I'll just go—if you'll come with me," he said, smirking like the idea had just popped into his head and he already knew I wouldn't say no.

He immediately held me by the waist as we walked inside the hotel entrance.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Demirian," the guard greeted, but this man just walked past him like a runway model.

So ako na lang ang ngumiti kahit naka-distansya na kami. The guard smiled back—

"Don't just smile at anyone, Solana," he said while we were walking inside the hotel. It was the tone in his voice. Calm, but possessive

Namangha ako— The hotel screamed luxury from the moment we stepped in. The floors were polished marble, so shiny I could see my reflection.

We reached a table where a man and a woman, both around 50 years old, were seated. Beside the woman was a younger girl—probably their daughter?

Hindi ko maiwasang i-kumpara ang sarili ko sa nakita ko.
Ang ganda. Ang kinis. Ang sosyal. Ako? Mahahalatang hindi pa nakabayad ng kuryente. Lumayo ako ng kaunti. I felt their eyes on me, judging, scanning, silently asking what someone like me was doing in a place like this.

But before the self-doubt could fully settle in, Malrick pulled more me toward him, unapologetic. Like he didn't care who was watching.

"Stay close," he whispered, his hand finding the small of my back

They all stood up the moment Malrick entered the room. Power shifted instantly, like the air had to adjust to his presence.

"Mr. Demirian, it's nice to see you again."

"Mr. Solavan," he nodded with his usual confident aura.

"I'm with my family, my wife, Klara, and our beautiful daughter, Patricia." Patricia's smile stretched slowly, eyes landing on me like I was an unexpected stain on a white couch.

Malrick just nodded to acknowledge their presence but didn't smile at all, and spoke in a cold voice.

"I'm with my girlfriend, Solana," he said.

Kinurot ko siya sa tagiliran, para saktan siya at matauhan sa kalokohan niya—pero ako yata ang nasaktan. Ang tigas!

"Anong 'girlfriend' ang pinagsasabi mo diyan?" I hissed under my breath, cheeks burning.

Mrs. Solavan gasped softly like she bit a chili. Mr. Solavan forced a polite chuckle. And Patricia She looked like someone just ruined her debut.

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✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 27 SPG

The meeting went well... I think. I honestly had no idea what it was really about because I was too busy enjoying my rice and buttered shrimp.

Mr. Solavan kept talking non-stop, discussing something very business-y, while Malrick...
Well, this man—this CEO surgeon investor was sitting there, peeling shrimp for me, shrimp. Isa-isa. With care. With love. With shrimp paste all over his fingers. And he didn't complain. Not once.

Across the table, Patricia eyed me like I just committed a crime.Tangina! wala akong ginawa

"That's my proposal, Mr. Demirian. I actually informed your grandfather about this already, but he told me to speak with you directly, since you'll be the one deciding. So, how's it sound?"
Mr. Solavan looked at Malrick with so much pride.

Silence.Silence

Malrick? Still peeling. Still focused. Not even blinking. Putangina. Hindi nakikinig ang lalaking 'to. Tinapakan ko siya. Sa ilalim ng table. Sa paa. Medyo madiin.

"I'm sorry—what was the plan again?" He said with a completely straight face, while still peeling shrimp. Nawala ang ngiti ni Mr. Solavan. He gave a forced smile before he started talking again.

But the way he placed that perfectly peeled shrimp on my plate after that... Parang ang hirap magalit.

I excused myself to go to the restroom. Sasama pa sana si Malrick, but I shot him a glare. Kaya naupo nalang ulit siya.

After I finished peeing and stepped out of the cubicle, I saw Mrs. Solavan standing in front of the mirror—staring at me. Intently. Like I was some bacteria on the glass.

I smiled politely and gave a slight bow, trying to be respectful. I walked to the sink, about to wash my hands, when she spoke

"I thought you were just his secretary." Nanlaki ang mata ko.

"H-hindi po," I said nervously, trying to smile.

"Your attire says so." She looked me up and down. Im just wearing a plain white fitted shirt and a black leggings .My heart dropped.

"My daughter and Mr. Demirian had a relationship before." So I just nodded quietly, trying to keep my cool.

She began washing her hands na kahit may tissue naman sa gilid, pero hindi
She walked right up to me and wiped her wet hands on my shirt.

I froze.

"And I will do everything to get them back together... even if it means making you disappear."

Then she turned on her heels and stormed out of the comfort room.

I stared at myself in the mirror. My white shirt was now wrinkled and wet. My eyes starting to get teary. Hindi, hindi ako puwedeng umiyak. Ayokong maghinala si Malrick.

Kaya pinaypayan ko ang sarili ko gamit ang kamay. Hanggang sa kaya ko.

After a minute, I decided to step out. Papalapit pa lang ako sa table nang madilim agad ang tingin niya, lalo na sa basang harapan ng t-shirt ko. Pagkaupo ko, hindi na siya nagpaligoy-ligoy.

"What the fuck happened to your shirt?" I knew he'd ask that.

"Uhh... w-wala kasing tissue sa loob," I said nervously, pointing toward the direction of the restroom.Umigting ang panga niya. Napatingin ako sa kabilang side, Mr. Solavan, trying to keep the meeting going.

"Mr. Demirian, as I was saying—"

"I'll think about your plan," Malrick cut in sharply.
"Let's end the meeting here."

He stood and carefully guided me away from the table.

As we walked toward his car, he took out his phone with one hand—his other arm wrapped tightly around my waist.

"Berto, block Mr. Solavan and his family from all of my companies." Then he kissed the top of my head.
"Good." And he hung up.

"Let's go, baby." he said, gripping my hand

"Bakit mo pinablock sina Mr. Solavan? Wala ngang ginawa ang asawa niya sa akin," I said, almost begging him to believe me.

"Hmm... I didn't say they did something to you, Solana," he replied as he gently guided me toward the car . Parang alam niyang may nangyari. At hindi niya hahayaang maulit pa.

And I just suddenly remembered.

"Patricia... is your ex-girlfriend?" I asked in a small, shaky voice.

"She was just a fling, baby. Nothing serious," he said softly, transferring his hand to my waist, trying to comfort me. But the ache in my chest refused to calm down.

"D-Did you... did you fuck her?" I asked hesitantly, barely above a whisper.He froze. Then sighed.

"Damn, baby... can we not talk about my past? I'm a changed man now."

"Am I your fling, then?" I asked, voice cracking, a sting tightening my chest. I slowly removed his hand from my waist. He blinked, face hardening.

"What? Hell no. Who the heck told you that?" he said, his voice turning sharp. I swallowed the lump in my throat.

"Your f-f*ck buddy, then?" His jaw clenched. Darkness clouded his face instantly.

"What the f*ck did you just say?" he growled, his voice low and dangerous I bit my lip, but the words slipped out before I could stop them.

"You've f*cked me multiple times already... " His jaw clenched. His hands turned into fists at his sides. He closed his eyes briefly, massaging the bridge of his nose like he was holding something back —

Then he tilted his head back, exhaling through his teeth.

"F*ck. No. No." He struggling . voice strained.

"Baby... maybe that wasn't just f*cking," he muttered, almost to himself. "that was love-making." Then he looked straight at me, eyes dark and glinting with heat.

"But if you want it rough—if you want it just f*cking—I can give that to you, too. Just say the word." My breath hitched. My body froze. He turned fully toward me, eyes burning—not with anger, but with pain and longing.

"Fuck that fuck buddy shit you're saying. You're not just a body to me. You're the whole damn heart." He exhaled deeply.And then... silence.

I loooked at him, heart pounding in my throat.

"But... I'm not your girlfriend yet," I said in a small, almost broken voice. He let out a breath—half relief, half frustration—and stepped closer.

"That's because you haven't said yes yet," he said softly, cupping my face with both hands like I was something fragile he didn't want to break.

Dumampi nang marahan ang mga hinlalaki niya sa pisngi ko, habang magkadikit ang aming mga mata—hindi umiwas, tapat, at may bahagyang takot

"But for me... you're already my girlfriend, Solana. Even if you haven't said it out loud. Even if we haven't labeled it yet." He swallowed hard.

"Even if I had to marry you right now just to prove it, I would." His voice cracked, but then it steadied, strong and sure.

"Because this? You and me? It's real. At least, for me... it's everything."he said as he kissed forehead.

Pagdating namin sa kotse niya, he opened the door for me. Inilagay pa niya ang kamay niya sa ulo ko habang pumapasok ako like I was something fragile. Pagkaupo ko sa loob, he didn't drive yet. Sa halip, iniabot niya ang kamay niya sa likod na upuan at kinuha ang isang shirt.

"Change your shirt. It's not good wearing it wet."

"D-Dito mismo?" I asked, blinking. He just nodded.

"P- Pero—" I sighed in defeat. As I lifted my shirt, I felt embarrassment crawl up my skin. Really, Solana? As if you're a virgin. When I finally managed to pull off my wet shirt and was about to put on his black one, I gasped.

He suddenly scooped me up and sat me on his lap.

"M-Malrick," I whispered, eyes wide as he stared at me, first my eyes, then my lips, then he rested his forehead against mine.

"Yes, baby," he rasped as he slid my bra aside. My breast slipped out, and he immediately leaned in and began sucking gently.

I knew his car was tinted... but still, I couldn't stop the worry. Especially when there were people walking past in the parking lot.

"Fuck!" I cursed under my breath as he kissed me hard, right after teasing my breast with his mouth.

I don't know how the hell he managed to pull down my leggings All I know is that I was completely naked, he was still fully dressed, and he just unzipped his pants and slid his hardness inside me.

Damn.His really huge. Napatingala ako sa sarap.

"Ahh! Malrick—" I moaned, head falling back.
"Fuck, baby," he growled, gripping my hips as I moved above him. His pace quickened, his hands guiding me .

Bigla siyang yumuko, and his lips found one of my breasts, hinalikan niya ito nang dahan-dahan—halos parang may paggalang habang ang isang kamay niya ay minamasahe ang kabila with care and want.

" Ahhh Malrick" I moaned.

I just moving on top of him so fast. The car may have been tinted, but that didn't stop the panic bubbling in my chest.

The damn vehicle was rocking. Outside, people passed by, completely unaware., and moments later, we both came.

Thank you very much to those who commented and voted. These help me write more. Please continue supporting me! MWUAHHH!

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 28

Nakakatulog ako sa biyahe on our way to the apartment. He just woke me up pagdating namin. Pero paglapit namin sa apartment ko, something felt off. Namilog ang mata ko kasi , dahil parang may iba. I looked at him intently, pero bigla siyang naging sobrang interesado sa Manang Soling's sari-sari store?! don't tell me mag-iinvest ka dyan!

Ang dating lumang kahoy na bintana... now sliding window na, parang sa mga condo.
Yung doorknob na dati halos tanggal na, napalitan ng high-tech lock, may fingerprint scanner pa yata 'to, putangina!

Hindi pa ako nakakapagsalita, he spoke casually
"That's for security purposes, baby." Tumango ako slowly.

Sige , security is important, lalo na't hindi basta-bastang tao ang katabi ko sa kama gabi-gabi.

Pero nung binuksan ko ang pinto...

Napapikit na lang ako sa inis.

Bago ang higaan. Tiles na ang sahig. May lababo na parang pang-hotel.
Fresh pintura. At may pa-aircon at refrigerator?!

I turned to him with daggers in my eyes.Baliw na nga yata itong lalaking ito. He straightened up, tumingin sa kisame as if may sagot dun.

"E-Erickson told me it would be better to have these stuff so that... ." Tumikhim siya. Matapang sa simula, pero pa-kupas habang nagsasalita.

Yung boses niya, parang signal sa probinsya, pahina nang pahina. I crossed my arms and waited. Dead silence.

"Igihan mong mag-isip, ," I said flatly, then walked in like a queen na naubusan ng pasensya.

"B-Baby!" he followed behind me, trying to hold my hand.

Weeks passed, and Malrick was just too irresistible. Kaya hindi na ako

nagtaka nang kumalat ang balitang buntis daw ako ni Doc, dahil daw makati ako.

Paglakad ko pa lang sa hospital hallway, ramdam ko na ang mga mata sa akin. Mga nurse, med student, kahit ilang pasyente, nagbubulungan habang pasimpleng sumusulyap.

"Yan 'yung nurse, 'di ba? 'Yung kay Dr. Demirian?"
"Grabe, ang kapal ng mukha... parang proud pa."
"Eh ganyan talaga pag pinatos ng isang doctor."
"Sana all, pinili kahit cheap." Sabay tawa.

Sa bawat pagpasok ko sa patient room, parang may tension. Tahimik. Tapos pagtalikod ko, ayan na naman, bulungan, sulyapan, irap. Tinitiis ko lahat. Dahil kahit masakit, ayokong isipin ng kahit sino na duwag ako. Pero sa totoo lang?

Unti-unti akong nabubura.

Malrick doesn't even have any idea how his actions affect me. Wala siyang pake.
Kung gusto niya, kukunin niya. Kaya nung isang gabi, hinila niya ako sa madilim na hallway ng ospital, idinikit sa pader at hinalikan ako ng mariin.

May nakakita sa amin—isang nurse. At ayon, kumalat ang balitang nabuntis daw ako.

Monday came, Dr. Dermirian, ...Malrick called a meeting with all department representatives, including us.
So we went straight to the hall where the big meetings usually happen.

"What do you think it's all about?" Simon asked beside me., the awkwardness between us was gone.Hindi ko na kasi binuksan ang topic na nahuli ko siyang may kahalikan noon si Ericka. So now, we talk like nothing ever happened.

"Baka nag-file na ng bankruptcy si Doc?" I joked.

"As if," Simon replied dryly. We sat down immediately nang nasa hall na kami, Hinahanap ko si Ericka, pero wala siya.

I just shrugged. Simon and I started talking about the journal we need to submit this weekend to our professor, since the meeting hadn't started yet.

Then, someone cleared his throat. It was Berto, holding a bottle of milk tea and a sandwich.

"Nurse Solana, pinabibigay daw ni Doc. Hindi mo raw sinasagot ang tawag niya," he said with a polite smile before walking away. Hindi na nga ako nakapag-thank you.

Then finally, Dr. Dermirian arrived, all composed and cold. He walked straight to the front and scanned the crowd. And then, our eyes met.

He looked relieved. Anong drama nya? He began discussing hospital achievements, department issues, and future plans— like this was just a normal meeting. Everyone was clapping, smiling, and nodding like everything was just so inspirational.

But then, at the very end of his speech, he suddenly changed the entire energy in the room. How I wish nalunok ako ng upuan. How I wish bigla akong naging clipboard which Simon's holding.

"And lastly, I want to address something personal...the rumors about me and my girlfriend—Nurse Solana."

TANGINA. Suniko agad ako ni Simon.
"Boyfriend mo na pala, ha?" he whispered with a smirk. I rolled my eyes.

Girlfriend agad? Ni hindi pa nga ako sinagot! May pa-rosas lang, tapos girlfriend-girlfriend na?Gago. Then Doc Malrick continued cool, composed, at parang walang nagkakandautal sa paligid.

"There have been rumors these past few days that I got her pregnant... which, honestly... I wish was true."

Putangina. Si Simon halos mabilaukan sa narinig.

"That's not true—for now. But it might be true. Next month, or so... just give me a little more time to—my own"

"Tangina mo, Malrick!" Hindi ko napigilan bulongin.

"But I just want to say this—" he began, voice calm but cutting through the murmurs like a blade.
"Yes, I like that part... but I didn't appreciate hearing people call her names." He looked around the crowd like he was examining if everyone understood.

"I know her. I know how hard she works. I know how big her heart is. So if you can't respect that she's my woman, at least respect that she's your nurse in my hospital." Tahimik ang buong room.

Awkward. Tangina! Bakit kasi may pa ganun pa . But then the host clapped. Nag-clap din lahat. Out of confusion or panic, I'm not sure. Naka-freeze, ako Para akong na-paralyze sahiya at kilig?

Then I saw him. Malrick walking toward me like he was about to claim his girlfriend like a trophy.

"Don't." I mouthed, Umiiling

He bent down slightly, whispering something only I could hear, something about us being labeled. Alam kong closing part na ng meeting, pero I was sure no one was really paying attention. Lahat sila, nakikiramdam. Observing not just the speaker, but *us,* lalo na *siya*.

"Come on, let's go to my office," he murmured, gently fixing my hair.

"Hindi pa tapos ang meeting," I said quietly, slowly removing his hand. Nakakahiya, Malrick. Ang daming nakatingin.

"It'll end in a minute. Let's go," he insisted.

Pero umiling ako. Hindi talaga. Alam kong pag tumayo ako, para akong artista sa stage—lahat ng mata mapapasakin. He sighed, and I thought tapos na. Akala ko aalis na siya.

Nagulat ako nang bigla siyang tumayo sa tabi ko, naka-pamulsa, acting like the most relaxed man in the room. He stared straight ahead like he was listening—pero alam kong hindi.

Dali-daling lumapit si Berto.

"Sir, do you need a chair?"

"No, I'm fine," he answered casually, then placed his hand over my shoulder. Lightly caressing it, as if we weren't surrounded by people.

Nilibot ko ang mata ko. Everyone's eyes were facing front, pretending to listen. Except for one.

Ericka. She was staring at me, hard. Parang gusto niya akong mawala. I suddenly felt cold. She wasn't like this before.

Bigla kong naisip... baka dahil kay Simon? Baka nagseselos siya?

Pagpasok pa lang namin sa office niya, diretso siya sa swivel chair niya, paikot-ikot pa ang gago, parang hindi ako galit.

Ako? Halos sumabog na.

"Ano 'yun, ha? Anong 'girlfriend' pinagsasasabi mo sa harap ng buong ospital?!" sigaw ko habang nakatayo pa rin, galit na galit. Pero hindi man lang siya natinag. Parang nanonood lang ng live teleserye.

"You clarified the girlfriend part," he said, smirking. "But you didn't correct me when I said I want to get you pregnant."

Nabilaukan ako sa sariling laway.

gayon ko lang na-realize what if... shit, baka mabuntis nga ako. Baka hindi ako safe no'n. Tangina! bibili ako mamaya.

"You can't get me pregnant," palusot ko agad. "Safe ako." He raised a brow, clearly not buying it.

"I checked your whole apartment. Wala kang contraceptives."

"Meron! Dala-dala ko palagi!" depensa ko, pero hindi ako makatingin diretso.

"I'll burn it when I see it," he muttered, jaw tight.

I sighed. Napansin kong hindi na siya nakangiti halatang bad trip dahil sa pills.

"Hindi mo ako pwedeng buntisin, Malrick. Hindi nga tayo mag-jowa," I said, this time with lambing, habang dahan-dahan akong lumapit sa kanya.

He didn't speak. Instead, binuka niya ang mga braso niya,welcoming me in like I was his home. He hugged me tightly, resting his head on my chest since nakaupo siya.

"Then please say yes already." Then he whispered, voice soft and serious, He said it in a voice so soft—hoping, begging.

"Then please... say yes already."

"I can't say yes, Malrick," I replied, trying hard not to smile. "I don't like you yet."

He froze, literal na tumigil ang paghinga niya. His arms slowly loosened around me. He nodded slowly, looking down.

I should've stopped there. But damn, I just had to tease him. I bit my lower lip, hiding the smile forming. Did I just break this man's heart... in the most evil way possible?

I gently pulled his face up. Damn him. Damn him for having that perfect, heartbreaking face.

My smile faded when I saw his eyes—namumula... and worse, namamasa.

Napalunok ako.Tangina. He's really hurt. Biglang nagsisi ang kalokohan ko. So I held his face with both hands, stared into his wounded puppy eyes, and whispered, this time, full of love:

"Hindi pa kita gusto..." He looked at me, shattered.

"...kahit mahal na kita. Mahal na mahal." His eyes widened, and before he could say anything, I kissed his forehead gently. He closed his eyes and smiled

"You're now my girlfriend," he said not a question, but a full-blown declaration.

I didn't even answer. I just nodded. And just like that, he stood up, cupped my face, and kissed me—gently at first, but full of love. Like he's waited forever for this moment.

Habang yakap-yakap pa rin niya ako, he pulled out his phone and dialed someone. I frowned.

"Grandpa, I'll bring my wife there this coming weekend."

"Ano ba! Boyfriend ka palang!" kinurot ko siya sa tiyan, Tangina Abs yan !

God. I so much love this man.
Even if he's stubborn.
Even if he's crazy.
Even if he's mine already, kahit wala pang label.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 29 SPG

Weeks passed since the meeting. Dati, kapag naglalakad ako sa hallway ng ospital, puro bulungan at masamang tingin ang inabot ko. Pero ngayon?Tangina, halos takot na lahat sa'kin.

Pag tinitigan ko, nanlalaki ang mga mata nila then they give me a shy smile at balik agad sa trabaho. Parang ako yung may-ari ng ospital. Well, girlfriend ng may-ari close enough.

Nasa station ako, focused on my work, when I felt it, that stare. Pag-angat ko ng tingin, ayun na nga si Malrick. Papalapit, suot ang black polo under his white coat, looking at me like I'm lunch.

Since naging official kami, wala nang preno ang lalaking 'to. *Damn his stamina.*

Bago pa kami umuwi, lagi siyang may quickie sa office niya, he loves hearing my moans when I can't hold them back... unlike when we're in the apartment.

"Let's eat lunch," he said in his usual authoritative-hot-but-annoying tone.

"Kakain kami nila Simon and Ericka. Birthday ni Simon, magsa-samgyup kami." Umiling ako agad.

Tumigil siya. Sakto namang parating sina Ericka at Simon.

"Nurse Dela Paz," Malrick called out, sharp. "You're eating lunch together with Solana?"

Napalunok si Simon. "D-Doc? Uh, opo. Birthday ko po kasi."

And then, he said it.

"Would it be okay to come with you? My treat." Putangina. Hindi niya ba naririnig kung gaano siya ka-intimidating?

"Opo naman po, Doc!" Simon tried to sound cheerful, but halata ang kaba.

"Alright. Let's use my car then."

Pagpasok namin sa elevator, sina Simon at Ericka nauuna. Ramdam ko ang awkward tension. Siniko ko si Malrick. Behave, gago. Pero anong ginawa? Hinawakan ang pwet ko and squeezed it hard, may dalang gigil.

"hahhh—" Napasinghap ako nang malakas. Putik.

He chuckle manly and deep, echoing through the whole elevator. Mas lalong naging awkward ang atmosphere. Pagbukas ng pinto at nakalabas na kami, Simon released a heavy sigh, like it had been the longest few seconds of his life. Parang hinihingal siya pero hindi sa pagod, sa kaba.

The waiter handed us the menu, but Malrick didn't even look at it. Instead, he leaned closer to me and asked,

"Would you like lobster, baby?" Nabilaukan si Simon sa iniinom niyang free lemonade. Napakapit siya sa lalamunan niya habang ako naman pinisil ko agad ang braso ni Malrick, real hard.

"Awww!" he winced, pero imbes na tumigil, he just laughed and wrapped his arm around my shoulder. Tangina talaga.

Across from us, nasa harap namin sina Simon at Ericka, parang nanigas, parang mga estudyanteng pinagalitan ng principal.

Then, Malrick turned to them with a polite smile but with cold aura.

"Would you guys like pineapple juice for a drink?" Simon straightened his back agad-agad, halatang kinakabahan.

"S-sige po, Doc. S-salamat po," he stuttered, tumikhim pa talaga bago sumagot.

It was Simon's birthday, and yet, halos walang salita sa table namin. The tension was so obvious, pero si Malrick! Walang pake. Tuloy lang siya sa pag-disect ng shrimp shells na parang walang awkwardness sa paligid.

Ako naman, hindi rin mapakali. Every now and then, mahuhuli ko si Ericka na nakatingin sa akin. Pero kapag nagkakatinginan kami, ngingiti siya ng pilit, ang weird.

Pagbalik namin sa hospital, I was about to head back to my station

when-

"Solana, stay with me," he said, holding my wrist gently.

"Bakit ba kasi?" I asked, shaking my head. Kami na lang dalawa sa elevator.

"I have something that you need to do. It's important," he said, trying hard not to smile.

"Tangina kang gago ka," I muttered, because I already knew. He burst out laughing, pulled me into a tight hug, kissed my forehead, and even messed up my short hair.

I didn't even have the time to complain when he started unbuttoning my polo. He kissed me hard so hard it left me breathless. Before I knew it, he had lifted me up, and I instinctively wrapped my legs around him

He set me down on top of his desk, lips trailing down my neck, then lower—
Until his mouth found my chest.
He sucked, bit gently, making me arch and moan.

"Ahhh,"I moaned when he sucked on me, then gave a slight bite that made my knees go weak.

Damn. Bakit ako na naman 'yung hubad na hubad? Siya naka-polo pa rin?! He didn't waste time.He spread my legs wide, really wide and knelt in between.

"Tangina," I gasped when he started licking me there. Napaliyad ako sa sarap. Para akong lechong palakang inihain sa mesa helpless, bukas na bukas.

And then—he slid two fingers inside me while his tongue kept working its magic.
"Ahhh, Malrick—ahhh! I'm close! Don't stop!" I moaned louder, unable to hold anything back.

But then... He stopped. Tangina.

He stood up, unbuckled his belt, and lowered his briefs, his shirt still on.
He didn't even bother undressing fully. His length sprang free, proud and hard. He's so huge , I wonder how I took it before

"Ass up, baby," he said, stroking himself

He helped me turn around, hands pressing against the table. And without warning He entered me. Ruthlessly. Completely.

"A-Ahhhhhh!" Tangina! Ang sakit. Napahawak ako sa edge ng table habang tuloy pa rin siya sa pag-ulos—deep and rough.

"Fuck, baby... fuck," he moaned, tumingala pa habang gigil na gigil ang hawak niya sa bewang ko. He squeezed and slapped my butt like he was losing control.

"M-Malrick, please... slow d-down!" I gasped, trying to catch my breath.

Then I saw it— Yung MacBook niya! Unti-unting nadudulas sa gilid ng table.Dang, ang mahal nun!

"Ahhhh! M-Malrick! Yung laptop mo—b-baka mahulog—A-Ahhh!"
I couldn't even finish my sentence as he thrust again, making my voice crack mid-warning.

Hindi na ako mapakali kakaisip sa laptop niya na halos mahulog na kanina—
Kaya bigla niya akong binuhat. Ruthlessly.

"Ahhh!" I gasped, as he thrusted hard while carrying me. Ang laki ng bukaka ko, sasakit nanaman balakang ko nito.

"Oh fucking hell, baby," he growled, his breath hot against my neck and gripped my legs hard.

And then he walked, while thrusting Diretso kami sa glass wall ng office. Kitang-kita ang buong city. Tangina, 1PM pa! May makakakita sa amin!

"M-Malrick! Ahh—don't! Don't go there! A-Ahh!" I cried out when he pulled out slightly, then slammed back in, deeper than ever.

He put me down gently, pero hindi pa tapos ang trip niya. I placed my hands against the cold glass wall. Tangina, napapikit ako, makikita kami rito!

Bigla niyang sinampal ang puwitan ko, making me gasp. The sound of our bodies colliding echoed in the room.
"M-Malrick, baka may m-makakita—ahhh!"he pulled his hard again

and slammed back, Tangina

He just chuckled darkly, raised one of my legs, and whispered near my ear,
"The glass is f*cking tinted, baby."

And then—he thrusted hard.
Like the city didn't exist. Like it was just us.

"I'm—f*ck—Solana baby , I'm so near... so damn near, baby..." His voice cracked as my hands trembled against the glass. And we both came.

Knowing Malrick, he'd never be satisfied with just two rounds. Tama nga ako. He carried me to the sofa and took me from behind dog style, his favorite when he was in full beast mode. Our moans filled the room like we didn't care anymore.

Then, a knock on the door. But of course, he didn't care. Didn't even flinch.

Minutes later, his phone rang.

Still buried inside me, he groaned, pulled out, grabbed his phone on the table,—napapikit ako sa sarap at bitin.

His voice was sharp, deadly calm.
"Cancel my fucking meeting, Berto. And don't you dare fucking disturb us again."

Then he dropped the phone on the floor and turned back to me, still hard. Still hungry, and slammed his hard on me without a warning.

"M-Malrick... h-hindi ko na kaya... ahhh... dahan-dahan lang, please..." Yun na lang ang huling nasabi ko, before we both came,

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 30

We're currently packing our things because we'll leave early tomorrow to visit his grandparents. It will be a three-hour car ride, so most likely aalis kami ng 6 AM. I noticed how struggling si Malrick mag-pack ng gamit niya, so I decided to help him.

"I'm sorry, Berto usually packs my things when I go out of town," he said as he hugged me from behind.

"Kinawawa naman si Berto, Malrick," I said, lightly slapping his leg, nasa gitna niya kasi ako

"I pay him really well. I even support his brothers' education." Nanlaki ang mata ko.

"Grabe. Sana pinagaral mo rin ako!" He burst out laughing.

"Alright, I'll tell Berto to pay your tuition in full." Sinabunutan ko siya at ngumiti siya lalo, tawa ng tawa.

The next morning, ako ang unang nagising. I decided to cook *adobo* for breakfast. Pagtingin ko sa salamin after washing my face in the bathroom—

Tangina talaga! Ang daming kiss marks! I sighed. Then I started chopping the ingredients. I peeked at the bed si Malrick tulog pa rin, nakanganga pa at humihilik pa ng kaunti. I walked near him and kissed his open mouth. He moved a little and furrowed his brows.

"I love you," I whispered softly into his ear, full of care.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," I said when he opened his eyes. He smiled immediately and pulled me into a hug kaya napaibabaw ako sa kanya.

"Good morning, baby," he whispered in that deep, raspy morning voice. Tangina. His morning voice should be illegal.

"Are you still sore?" he asked, his hand slowly sliding down to my butt and giving it a squeeze.

"Wag ka nga! Nagluluto ako ng adobo," I snapped as I tried to wriggle free, worried baka masunog pa 'yung niluluto ko.

"My favorite?" he asked.

"Oo. Kaya bumangon ka na at maligo," I said while standing up. He groaned like a spoiled kid. Arte talaga!

Nakaluto na ako ng adobo nang lumabas siya ng CR. Ni hindi man lang nag-towel. Tangina. Kita ko talaga... tayong-tayo pa. Baliw talaga 'tong lalaking 'to.

"Ano ba! Magbihis ka na, maliligo na rin ako," I said and elbowed him when he hugged me from behind.

"May laman na ba ito?" he asked, caressing my stomach like a weirdo.

"Hindi mo nga ako mabubuntis!"

"I'll find that motherf*cker and burn it," he said, referring to my birth control. Pumasok na ako sa banyo. Napatingin ako sa sarili ko sa salamin. Putangina. Nakalimutan ko na namang bumili. Safe pa naman siguro ako... Tamang dasal lang, Solana. Dasal lang.

Malrick hates condoms. Gusto niya laging raw. Putangina nya

We got out of our apartment. Erickson helped us with our two maletas. Si Aling Krosana, nasa labas, naninigarilyo. Nasa likod niya 'yung apo niyang mahinhin, kinukuhanan siya ng puting buhok.

"Magandang umaga po, Doc!" halos matumba si Aling Krosana sa pagmamadali tumayo.

I just rolled my eyes. Noon nga, hindi ako tinatantanan kahit tulog pa ako—singil agad!

I honestly wonder how much Malrick paid her para pumayag sa instant renovation ng apartment ko. Ilang oras lang yun ah!

"G-Good morning po, Doc... Solana," bati ni Kalsey apo ni Aling Krosana. Mahinhin, maganda, at ang alam ko, Grade 12 pa lang siya.

Palabas na kami ng iskinita nang mapansin ko si Tanyok sa gilid ng kalsada. May hawak siyang alak. Kasing-edad ko lang siya, pero 'di mo aakalaing sabay kami lumaki—lalo na sa hitsura ng buhay namin ngayon.

"Naks! Magbabakasyon ka, Solana?" sigaw niya habang sinisip sip ang alak sa bote. Tapos tiningnan niya si Malrick mula ulo hanggang paa. "Abay, naka-bingwit ka ng mayaman ah. Iba talaga kamandag mo!"

Umigting ang panga ni Malrick. Tangina. Kilala ko na 'tong titig na 'to. Sasabog na sana siya pero agad ko siyang hinawakan sa kamay. Sanay na ako kay Tanyok. Hindi na bago sa'kin ang ganitong pambabastos galing sa mga walang magawa.

Wala si Erickson? Siguro nagche-check pa ng lock. Kung nandito 'yon, baka bagsak agad sa semento si Tanyok.

"Tatahimik ka o bobombahan ko yang bunganga mo," sabi ko, diretso ang tingin habang hawak pa rin ang kamay ni Malrick. Nang makalayo na kami ng konti, nilingon ko si Tanyok. Nakatitig pa rin. Ang kapal. Binigyan ko siya ng middle finger.

Pagkarating namin sa kotse, pinauna ako ni Malrick sumakay. Naiwan siya sa labas, parang may hinihintay. Ilang saglit pa, dumating si Erickson.

"That's still a minor, you motherfucker!" sigaw ni Malrick kay Erickson. Tumawa lang si Erickson, parang wala lang sa kanya. Ako naman, napa-shrug na lang

Isinara ni Malrick ang pinto ko, saka siya umikot at sumakay sa driver's seat. Bago pa man i-start ang sasakyan, hinalikan niya muna ang noo ko.

After kalahating oras, tumigil muna kami sa isang café para magpahinga at magkape. Pagkatapos nun, balik biyahe.

Isang oras pa ang lumipas, at puro berde na ang paligid. Trees, damuhan, at sa kabilang side—dagat. Hindi ko maiwasang mamangha. Para akong batang ngayon lang nakakita ng ganito kagandang view.

"You can open the window, baby." Ngumiti ako, tumango, at binuksan ang bintana. Pumikit ako habang dinadama ang hangin. Ang sarap. Ang presko. Ang tahimik.

Pagdating namin sa isang bahagi ng kalsada kung saan may perfect na view ng dagat sa gilid, pinahinto ko si Malrick.

"Dito muna tayo," sabi ko.

"That's why I chose to drive than ride a helicopter," sabi niya habang niyayakap ako mula sa likod. "I knew you'd enjoy the ride." Tumingala ako sa kanya at ngumiti. Ofcourse he has a helicopter. tsk

"Salamat. Mahal na mahal kita, Malrick." Hinalikan niya ako ng buo niyang pagmamahal. Pagkatapos ng halik, pinagdikit namin ang noo namin, sabay ang hangin ng dagat at ang tibok ng puso ko.

"I love you too, so much, baby. Damn much." Saka niya hinalikan ang noo ko ulit. Napapikit ako. Sarap sa feeling. Hangin. Dagat. Yakap ni Malrick.

"Let's take a picture, baby."

"Nanadya ka ba?" tanong ko, dahil alam naman niyang Nokia lang ang cellphone ko. He laughed hard.

"Using my phone, Solana."he took a lot of pictures, ng mukha ko, ng ngiti ko, ng dalawa kami. Sa loob ng kotse, pinasa niya sa akin ang phone niya.

Namula ang mukha ko.

Wallpaper? It was a photo of me, tulog, may kumot sa dibdib, pero halatang walang suot, with visible hickeys near my collarbone. Mukha akong pagod na masaya. At ang buhok ko? Gulo-gulo. waraknawarak look? Gago

"Tangina mo, Malrick," I whispered while staring at the screen. He chuckled.

"What? You look damn hot there!"

Ang daming magagandang kuha yung isa, naka-hug siya sa likod ko, ako naman ngiting-ngiti na parang nabigyan ng bonus. Ang ganda ng camera. Ang ganda ng kuha.

Binalikan ko ang ibang photos, masaya naman. Until nag-swipe ako ng isang video.

"Ahhh... ahhh... Malrick! M-Malrick! Ahhh... Tangina!"

NAPALAGLAG KO ANG CELLPHONE. Eyes wide. Tumigil ang mundo.

"A-ano 'yon?!" I asked, nervously glancing at him. He just smirked.

"Hmm? What , baby?" kunwaring inosente

"Bakit may video kang... kinakantot ako?!" I spat angrily, eyes wide in shock.

"Damn, your word choice, baby," he muttered, rubbing his temples, but laughed

"I always listen to it in my office. Whenever I work." Napapikit ako. Literal na gusto kong manlumo.

"Gago ka ba? I-delete mo 'yan! Baka kumalat pa! Ma-trending pa tayo "

"That would never happen," he said smoothly. "My phone's highly protected. No one's getting into it."

Pagdating namin sa isang malawak at mataas na gate, bumaba ang tint sa salamin. The guard peeked inside, nodded, and pressed something on his walkie-talkie.

"Nandito na ang seniorito." And the gate slowly opened, revealing a whole different world inside.

Sa loob, bumungad sa amin ang malawak na hacienda, parang out of a dream. Sa gitna, may malaking marble fountain na may dumadaloy na tubig

Green everywhere—from perfectly trimmed hedges to towering trees swaying gently in the breeze. Flower different with colors, roses, orchids, even sunflowers. May mga stone pathways, gothic-style lanterns, at mga white pillars leading to a Spanish-style mansion.

The house itself looked like a mix of old money and modern power, Everything about the place whispered: This isn't just luxury. This is legacy.

I spotted two elderly people probably around 70s and a man and woman in their 50s and 40s.

"My parents are here, by the way," Malrick said casually. Nanlaki ang mata ko. Para akong naiihi bigla. Kinabahan ako ng todo. Lumabas si Malrick at umikot para buksan ang pinto sa gilid ko. Pero para akong tuod sa pagkakaupo ko.

"Come on, I got you," he said habang hinalikan ang noo ko. Mas lalo akong nanlumo nang makita ko ang babae sa loob na sumilip mula sa pintuan ng sasakyan. She had the same sharp eyes as Malrick. Nanlaki rin ang mata niya nang magtama ang tingin namin.

So I got out, gripping the hem of my T-shirt tightly as I stepped down.

"M-Malrick," his mom said, her voice shaky and teary-eyed, as she hugged her son tightly. The man beside her, probably Malrick's dad gently caressed her back while smiling proudly.

"Marlick, apo!" His grandma rushed in to hug him next.

"Welcome back, young man," his grandpa greeted with a firm yet warm voice.

And I can say—wala talagang biro ang lahi nila. Malrick inherited his dad's face, kopyang-kopya talaga, while he only got his mom's eyes.

"This is Solana, my girlfriend," he introduced proudly.

"H-hello po, k-kumusta po?" I said nervously, bowing my head a little. But what shocked me the most was when his mom pulled me into a tight hug.

"Finally! Welcome to the family, iha. You are so pretty," she said warmly. I hugged her back. Ang bait nila. They welcomed me wholeheartedly. I felt safe. Nag-lunch kami , and not once did they make me feel like I didn't belong.

Tita Mari and I were in he living room, laughing over funny things, when Malrick suddenly walked in.

"Mom, we'll go upstairs. Solana needs to rest after the long drive," he said casually. Nanlaki ang mata ko! Ang kapal talaga ng mukha ng lalaking 'to, hindi man lang nahiya!

"Oh! Right! I forgot!" natawa si Tita Mari, yung tawang tunog dolyar. "I'm so sorry, iha. I hope we can still talk soon?"

"Po? Naku, of course! We can still talk later po or maybe bukas," I replied politely.

"As much as I'd love to, iha, pero your Tito and I need to fly to Mexico for a business meeting," she said while fixing her scarf.

She went close to me, whispered, "I'll buy you a pasalubong," and winked before walking over to Tito Virrelus.

I was lying on his chest, breathing heavily. We just finished making love, on the carpet, in the bathroom, even sa side table. Damn this man. Walang kapaguran. Parang sinadya niyang ubusin ang lakas ko.

"I love you," I whispered habang pinaglalaruan ang nipple niya.

"I love you too, baby," sagot niya habang hinahalikan ang ulo ko.

"Hindi mo ako iiwan?" tanong ko, medyo malungkot.

"Fuck? Why would I leave you, Solana?" he said, confused but soft.

"We don't know what the future holds, Malrick," I murmured habang hinawakan ko ang kamay niya, intertwining our fingers. Bakit ako naiiyak?

"Fuck that future," he replied firmly. "That future where you're my bride, walking down the aisle, becoming my wife and the mother of our children."My heart clenched. My lips trembled.

"Promise?" I asked in a soft voice. I don't know why, pero may luhang pumatak sa mata ko. Pinahid ko agad, baka mapansin niya. He hugged me tighter and kissed my forehead.

"I don't make promises, baby. I take action. But if that's what'll help you sleep at night—then fuck it, I fucking promise."I smiled weakly and whispered,

"And I also promise to hold on to your promises, no matter what happens."

OMG, ano kaya mang yayari HEHHHHHHEHHEHE

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 31 SPG

We're heading to their private lake and waterfalls using Amando, his horse. Sabi niya, regalo raw ito ng grandparents niya noong nag-sixteen siya. Regalo?

"Malrick ko kaya," I whispered, watching him smoothly get on Amando like he's done it a thousand times.

"I got you, come on." He eyed me from head to toe especially the *tube dress* I was wearing, the one Tita Mari told me to wear today. Nahihiya akong tanggihan si Tita kaya sinuot ko kahit hindi ako sanay.

"Damn... that dress." Umigting ang panga niya. Tangina, bakit ba ang gwapo nito kahit sando lang at maong suot?

When I got closer, I stepped on the wooden stump and he effortlessly pulled me by the waist parang papel lang ako sa laki at lakas niya.Agad akong napakapit sa legs niya.

"M-Malrick, baka mahulog ako..."
"I won't let you. Just don't move, baby." At pinatakbo na niya si Amando. Pumikit na lang ako dahil ramdam ko ang gulong ng tiyan ko para akong mahuhulog talaga!

"Open your eyes, baby," he said softly. I slowly opened them nanlaki ang mata ko. In front of me was a wide pineapple farm. Ang daming taong nagtatrabaho, waving and smiling as we passed. Hindi kami huminto ni Malrick.

Then we passed through a breathtaking flower field. Para akong nasa ibang mundo.

"I'll bring you here again," he promised habang yakap ako mula sa likod.

Napakaganda dito. Malayong-malayo sa syudad. Dito parang pwede akong huminga ng malalim, at mahalin siya ng tahimik.

Pumunta kami sa falls at naligo. It was very refreshing the water was so clear. Ang lamig ng tubig, pero ang sarap sa pakiramdam. Tumawa kami nang tumawa habang nagtatalsikan ng tubig. Naramdaman kong nawala lahat ng pagod at stress. Napakaganda ng tanawin, at parang

saglit kaming nakatakas sa gulo ng mundo.

After an hour, we decided to go to the lake already still using Amando.

"Baby," he said as he gripped my legs.

"Hmmm?" I hummed, kasi nage-enjoy ako sa mga green na tanawin.

"I'm hard, baby. I want you," he whispered as he kissed my temple and licked it.

Nasinghap ako.
"M-May cabin ka na d-dito sa gubat?" Tangina, Solana, gusto mo rin.

"No, I don't, baby," he said, clearly struggling to hold back.

Nanlaki ang mata ko nang pinahinto niya si Amando.
Don't tell me... sa damuhan kami?
I know Malrick is ruthless but I can't imagine doing it sa damuhan!
Tangina!

But I froze when I heard him open his zipper and pull out his hardness. D-Dito? Kay Amando?

"Put your panty to the side while I lift you up, baby," he said hoarsely from behind me. He lifted me up with both hands. I slid my panty to the side. Then he lowered me down right onto his hardness. Saktong-sakto!

"Ahhhh, Malrick," I moaned, gripping him tight.

"Damn, baby... ang sarap mo," he groaned, as he made Amando run. Kasabay ng takbo ni Amando ang mga ungol ko.

Malrick didn't even need to move, Amando was doing it for us.

"Fuck, baby... fcck... moan for me," he growled. Nanlaki ang mata ko nang makita ko ang lake. Tangina, nagawa ko pang ma-appreciate ang lake. Thankfully, walang tao. I think this is a private area of theirs.

Malrick made Amando stop under a tree. He pulled his hardness out of me, which made me moan uncontrollably. Bumaba siya at tinulungan akong bumaba rin. He guided me to the tree trunk, then slammed into me from behind.

Napakapit ako nang mariin sa puno.

"I'm near, baby... f*ck, you're so wet," he said, pulling out again. Then he carried me, this time, facing him—and pinned me against the tree. My legs wide open, both hands held tight as he thrust mercilessly. We came hard in that position.

"Ang ganda ng lake," I managed to say right after, breathless. He chuckled

"So are you, baby," he whispered, kissed my forehead, then gently pulled out.We used his shirt as a mat and sat down near the lake, catching our breath.

Then, out of nowhere, I asked:

"Malrick... what if I did something bad? Would you still forgive me?" I asked, not even daring to look at him. He didn't answer right away. Instead, he reached for my hand, intertwining his fingers with mine.

"Baby," he said slowly, voice low but certain,
"I don't care what it is. No matter how bad, how dark, how wrong... I'll still forgive you."

"Why?" My voice cracked.
"Why would you forgive me?"

"Because it's you." He gave me that tender look
"And because losing you would break me more than whatever mistake you made."

I swallowed the lump in my throat, heart pounding.
"Hindi mo ako iiwan?" I asked, barely a whisper, scared of the answer.

He looked at me seriously this time. No smile, no teasing. Just his eyes and all the truth he could offer.

"I'm f*cking in love with you, baby. I might die without you." His voice trembled slightly, but his grip on my hand tightened as if letting go would kill him.
"You're not just someone I want. You're my beginning, my middle... and if the world lets me, my end." He took my face gently in his hands and kiss me

"I don't want anyone else to love you through hard days except me." He pulled me close, holding me like he never wanted to let go.

Mapaiyak ako. I never thought I'd love a guy like this in my whole

life. Na kaya kong itaya ang buhay ko, basta't maprotektahan ko siya.

Ganun ko siya kamahal. Mahal ko siya higit pa sa sarili ko.

Days turned into weeks, and we both got busy. The hospital became even busier, overflowing patients, nonstop emergencies, and barely any rest. Everything felt like it was moving too fast.

Then suddenly, in the middle of everything... bad news hit us like wildfire. Someone screamed from the ER hallway, and the sirens roared outside, louder than usual, more urgent than normal.

Ito lng muna gusto ko kayong mabitin , next update: 2026 hoyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy hindi pwede, Enjoy nyo muna red chapters, sa susunod wala na , namimihasa na kayo... hoyy hindi pwd magalit sa reader HAHAHHHAA

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 32

Don Valtar, Malrick's grandpa, was rushed to the hospital due to a cardiac arrest brought on by a sudden brain aneurysm that required immediate surgery. Everyone went crazy about it. I was assigned as an assistant nurse to monitor Don Valtar, kasama si Simon.

Naging abala rin si Malrick. Pero kahit papaano, nagkakaroon pa rin kami ng oras para magkasama At kahit hindi ko man masabi nang diretso, natatakot ako. Natatakot akong unti-unti siyang agawin ng mga pader ng ospital sa akin.

He still goes home with me. He still does. And that's what I'm thankful for. That even when everything feels like it's slipping away... he still chooses to come home to me.

"Malrick, para kang bata. Tatlong araw ka lang naman doon." I tried to sound firm, but my voice wavered. Deep inside, I was just scared of being without him, even for a while.

"That would be three days in hell, baby." He groaned, running his hand through his messy hair , I could tell he hated the thought of leaving me.

"Para sa lolo mo 'yon, kaya pumunta ka. Kailangan 'yon." I reached for his hand and held it tightly. I wanted him to know this wasn't about pushing him away.

"I don't want to leave you here." His voice cracked a little. He looked at me like he was afraid I'd disappear the moment he walked out the door.

"Hindi mo naman ako iniiwan. Tatlong araw lang 'yan. ." I stepped closer and placed my hand gently on his cheek.

 He looked down, and I saw the fear he was trying to hide. The fear of not being there when I needed him most.

Yumakap ako sa kanya, hinila ko siya palapit. G At nang ilapat niya ang mukha niya sa leeg ko, parang ngayon pa lang ay nami-miss na niya ako... pumikit ako at lalo siyang niyakap nang mahigpit.

We didn't need to say anything else. We both knew three days could feel like forever.

He just nodded. Ayaw kong tingnan ang maleta niya. Hindi ko alam... naiiyak ako. Tatlong araw lang naman siya sa U.S. to have an appointment with the best brain surgeon in the world.

"Lakad na. Naghihintay na si Erickson sa labas," I said. He sighed heavily.

"I'll call you from time to time." Hindi ako sumagot. I just kissed him.

Nang umalis siya, hindi ko napigilan ang mga luha ko. Kaya dali-dali akong uminom ng tubigbut I dropped the glass. Nabasag ito at nasugatan ang kamay ko. Napaupo ako sa sahig habang tumutulo ang dugo. Nanginginig ang kamay ko habang dinadampian ng tissue ang sugat. Para akong baliw umiiyak, duguan, at parang walang matinong direksyon.

Night came, and the quiet of the apartmnt welcomed me like a ghost. Naiiyak na naman ako. Parang ang tagal ng tatlong araw!

At 10 p.m., I heard a knock.

Tangina. Don't tell me... bumalik siya? Kahit magalit ako, hindi ko maipagkaila ang kagalakan.

I hurriedly opened the door but

"Mr. Solavan?" Nanlaki ang mata ko nang may malamig na bagay na dumikit sa tiyan ko.

"'Pag sumigaw ka... hindi ako magdadalawang-isip na patayin ka." His voice was calm—too calm. And that terrified me more than if he had shouted. I opened the door wide, nanginginig. Halos di ko maigalaw ang mga daliri ko.

"Lock it," he said, the gun now pressed against my temple.

Dahan-dahan kong isinara ang pinto at ini-lock, halos di makahinga.

"To the table," he ordered. Nanunuyo ang lalamunan ko.

My legs were shaking as I walked, parang bibigay sa bawat hakbang. I sat on the stool. He placed the gun on the table, right in front of me. Gusto kong kunin iyon. I wanted to scream, to run, to fight—but I knew... I was nothing against him. He was bigger. Stronger. And right now, he held all the power.

He reached into his bag and pulled out a laptop, laptop ni

Malrick. Nanlaki ang mata ko. Nanginig ang buong katawan ko.

"A-Ayoko po..." I whispered, my voice cracking as sobs escaped my chest.
Nanginginig ako sa takot, tumutulo na 'yung luha ko, at pati labi ko, hindi na mapigilan sa panginginig.

"Password."His tone was cold. Walang emosyon. Utos lang.

"A-Ayoko..." I shook my head, desperate.

Umiling ako habang umaagos ang luha sa pisngi ko. My breathing was shallow, fast, like I was drowning. My fingers dug into the edge of the stool just to keep myself from collapsing.

Please, someone help me. Please, Malrick...

Then

"Nurse Solana?" Nanlaki ang mata ko.

Si Erickson.

My lips parted, ready to scream—pero bigla niyang hinablot ang baril at itinutok sa noo ko. At kinasa niya ito. My breath hitched. Parang natuyuan ako ng laway. One wrong move and it would all be over.

Napapikit ako. Tears streamed down my cheeks again, uncontrollably. Umagos na naman ang luha ko.

"Sabihin mo... matutulog ka na. Wag kang manggulo." His voice was low, threatening.

I shook my head, terrified. Pero bigla niyang diniin ang baril sa ulo ko..

"E-Erickson... matutulog na ako." I stammered, my voice barely a whisper.

"Wag... wag mo akong distorbohin." He leaned in closer, his breath cold against my skin—at lalo kong naramdaman ang bigat ng takot sa dibdib ko.

"Masusunod, Nurse Solana," sagot niya mula sa labas, naramdaman kong nawalan ako ng hininga.

Mr. Solavan pulled a chair and sat beside me.

"Makinis ka pala... kaya ulol na ulol si Doc sa'yo. Animal. My company went bankrupt because of him." Nanginginig ako. Hindi ko na alam kung nanlalamig ako sa takot o sa galit.

"Type mo na ang password." Umiling pa rin ako, kahit halos hindi ko na makita ang screen dahil sa luha.

"Madali naman akong kausap," sabi niya. Kinuha niya ulit ang baril—at this time, diniin niya sa ulo ko, at marahang hinalikan ang sentido ko.

Para akong mababaliw.

Nanginginig akong nag-type ng password. Tuhod ko, dibdib ko, kamay ko—lahat ng parte ng katawan ko nanginginig. The password that Malrick told me. He trust me so much.

Nang ma-unlock ang laptop, humagulgol ako. Parang tuluyang gumuho ang mundo ko.

"Masunurin naman pala," bulong niya sa tenga habang may tinitipa sa keyboard.

Tumigil ako sa pag-iyak nang makita ko ang screen.

Nanlaki ang mata ko.

"P-please... ayoko po..." bulong ko, halos di na lumalabas ang boses. He turned the screen to me. Nakalagay doon:

Transfer: 100,000,000.00
To: Solana Suarez

Hinalikan niya ulit ang sentido ko. Sunod, ang leeg ko. Humahagulgol lang. Paulit-ulit. Wala akong lakas. Wala akong laban.

Ayoko magnakaw. Ayoko. I covered my mouth with both hands, trying to keep myself from screaming when I felt his hand slowly touch my thighs.

Diyos ko... tulungan mo ako.

When he was about to pull down my cotton shorts and kissed my neck

I didn't hesitate. Walang pag-aalinlangan. I signed digitally. Ramdam ko ang panginginig ng daliri ko habang pinipindot ang screen.

Transferring... .....Sucessful

Then silence.

Hindi ko alam kung paano... kung kailan... nawala si Mr. Solavan sa apartment ko. Basta pagtingin ko ulit, wala na siya. Ang pintuan bukas. Parang multo lang siyang dumaan sa buhay ko—iniwan akong basag.

Iyak lang ako nang iyak. Wala akong lakas. Wala akong boses.

I was molested by an old man. A man who touched me like I was nothing.

Nandidiri ako. Kahit anong kuskos ko, kahit anong sabon—hindi mawala ang laway niya sa leeg ko.

"Ang baho mo," I whispered to myself. "Ang dumi mo, Solana..." Humagolhol na lang ako sa banyo. Hinalikan niya ako. Hinawakan niya ako.

Kinabukasan, mugto amg mga mata ko. Namamaga. Parang ilang gabi na akong hindi natutulog.

Pero kailangan kong pumunta sa ospital. I need to be there for Don Valtar. For Malrick. Kahit durog ako, kailangan kong bumangon. Hindi ako mapakali sa byahe. Parang may matang nakasunod sa akin. Parang bawat kanto, bawat anino siya. I clutched my bag tighter, my fingers trembling.

"Nurse Solana? Are you okay? Namumutla ka," one of the nurses asked, concern in her voice.

"Wala 'to. Baka pagod lang," I replied quickly, forcing a smile.

"Sure ka? Parang umiiyak ka kagabi pa..."

"I'm fine, po" But my voice shook— nd I knew she noticed.

Papunta na sana ako sa private room ni Don Valtar para i-check ang vitals niya nang bigla akong makaramdam ng malamig na presensya. Parang may matang nakasunod.

When I looked back, I saw Simon walking toward me.

"Solana." I smiled at him happily.

"Simon, saan ka ba galing? Kanina pa ako hanap nang hanap sa'yo." He didn't answer right away. He just looked at me with sadness in his eyes. Sobrang lungkot.

"May pasyente lang akong pinuntahan, Solana. Magbabanyo lang ako. Ikaw na lang magbigay nito kay Don," sabay abot ng syringe. "Sabi ni Dr. Falcon, ito raw 'yung bagong gamot ni Don."

"Okay, sige, banyo ka na."
"Baka maka-tae ka pa," dagdag ko pa, pilit na pabiro.

I even laughed, and to my surprise, he did too. With tears in his eyes.

Tanga. Napasobra yata ang tawa.

I stepped into Don Valtar's private room. I heard that Malrick was on his way, kasama ang parents niya. Ang Donya raw ay nagpapahinga sa isang hotel na pag-aari nila. Don Valtar looked so weak. His chest rose and fell only because of the machines. They were the only things keeping him alive now.

Napaluha ako. This man... he's the grandfather of the only man I've ever loved. And if he goes... Malrick will fall apart.

I took a deep breath.

Walang pag-aalinlangan, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a rosary. I knelt beside him. I prayed—hard.

I didn't care if the tears flowed. I didn't care if anyone saw me. I begged, for mercy, for healing, for time. Then gently, I placed the rosary in his hand. As if it could protect him... or guide him.

After a moment of silence, I pulled out the syringe that Simon gave me. I injected it carefully into the IV line.

"Pagaling ka lolo" I whispered, voice shaking. I leaned in and kissed Don Valtar's forehead, eyes stinging, heart heavy.

Then I turned and left the room.

It was already 8 p.m., but I stayed in the hospital. Malrick texted me, they'll land in an hour, kasama ang surgeon at ang pamilya niya. Dito ko na lang siya hihintayin.

Don Valtar's relatives were here too. Tahimik. Mabigat ang paligid. Lahat sila, inaabangan ang pagdating ni Malrick.

Then—

I heard a scream.

And just like that, my whole body turned cold.

"Code blue! Room 309!" Don Valtar's room.

"Vitals dropping fast!"

"Start compressions—NOW!" pero wala

Don Valtar is dead. Nanginginig ako. Mapaiyak, paano? Bakit? Ang bilis.

And Malrick...
God, Malrick. I can still hear his happy voice in my head, full of hope, habang sinasabi niyang kasama niya na ang surgeon.

I was sitting in the corner of the hospital hallway... nanginginig. My hands were cold. My lips dry. My whole body felt like it wasn't mine.

The injection? My eyes flicked to the floor. I shook my head, trying to chase the thought away.

No... no... It wasn't that. It couldn't be that.

"No..... no I did it right. Im sure it was right' I whispered to myself, but the words sounded like a lie. My chest tightened. My breathing hitched.

Napapikit ako.

And then—I remembered him.

Malrick.

Malrick.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 33

His laugh. His voice. His face. God.

What will I tell him? I buried my face in my hands, trying to stop the sob from escaping my throat. But it was no use. I broke.

Because I didn't just lose Don Valtar today.

I might lose Malrick too.

I sighed, trying to collect myself. But when I opened my eyes I froze.

Mallory. A doctor of her Hospital. And Malrick's cousin. She was storming toward me like a hurricane—her white coat flowing behind her, eyes burning with fury.

"Nurse Suarez!" she shouted. I stood up, startled. Napasinghap ako nang makita ko ang hawak niya, ang syringe.

The syringe I threw earlier.
The one I used.
From Simon. She raised it in the air, her hands trembling not with fear, but with rage.

"Do you know what this is?" her voice cracked. "What did you do to Grandpa?"

Her hands trembled as she held up the item, eyes filled with disbelief and fear as she waited for an answer that could break her. .I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

The hallway spun. Everything around me felt distant like I was sinking.

"The head nurse told me you were the one who got the last person out of Lolo's room," she said through gritted teeth.

"Magsalita ka, Solana!" she screamed.

Umalpak na naman ba ako ngayon? Pero ngayon... may napatay na ako.

Tumulo ang luha ko. Paisa-isa. Hanggang sa hindi ko na napigilan,

bumuhos ito. Napahikbi ako, hawak ang dibdib kong parang sinasakal.

Mali ba... ang pag-inject ko? The question echoed in my mind like a curse.

Mali ba ako? Ako ba talaga?

Ayoko.

Ayoko.

Ayokong aminin.

Because if I do—kakamuhian ako ni Malrick.
At 'di ko kakayanin 'yon.

Nanginginig ang baba ko dahil sa hikbi. Hindi... hindi pwede.

Ayoko!

I shook my head "H-hindi ako... n-nagkakamali lang sila..." Napapikit ako nang bigla niya akong sampalin.

Nahilo ako. Parang may bombang sumabog sa loob ng ulo ko. Umiikot ang paningin ko.

Napalunok ako, nanginginig. People stopped. Heads turned.

Pinagtinginan ako ng lahat. I heard whispers. Gasps.

I suddenly remembered Malrick . Baka hindi na niya ako mahalin.

Baka hindi na siya mabaliw sa'kin tulad ng dati. Baka... sa isang sulyap lang niya sa'kin, makita niya hindi na ako ang babaeng minahal niya, kundi ang babaeng pumatay sa lolo niya.

Umagos muli ang panibagong luha. Mas mabigat. Mas mainit.

Hindi...

For the second time around, I shook my head.

"H-Hindi ako—" Napahinto ako. Another slap.

This time, natumba ako. My knees gave out. My back hit the cold floor.

I couldn't see clearly, my face was soaked in tears.

"I will sue you! I will definitely sue you! You murderer! I'll make sure you rot in prison!" I heard her scream, voice shaking with rage and grief.

Murderer.

The word echoed in my head like a bullet.

Murdered.
I killed Don Valtar.

I killed him.

I killed him.

I... killed... him.

Each word fell like a stone in my chest. Heavy. Sharp. Permanent.

The hallway around me blurred.

Naglalakad ako palabas ng ospital na parang nakalutang. Parang wala na ako sa sarili.
Tahimik lang ang mundo pero sa loob ko, may sigawan. May iyakan.

Napaluha ako. Kasi kahit anong oras, alam kong... Alam kong makukulong ako.

"Miss, ikaw ba si Solana Suarez? Sumama ka sa amin." Tumigil ang paghinga ko.

Pulis.
May pulis sa harapan ko.

I just nodded. Napahikbi ako.
Tiningnan ako ng isa sa kanila parang sayang ako. Parang basura. Parang hindi na ako tao. Dinala nila ako presinto .

"Maghintay ka sa kaso'ng isasampa sa'yo," sabi ng pulis, malamig ang boses.

Pagkapasok ko pa lang sa loob

"Hoy! Ganda, anong ginawa mo?" Isang babaeng naka-itim ang tumingin sa akin. Matalim ang tingin niya, puno ng panghusga.

Umiling lang ako. Wala akong masabi. Umiyak lang ako.

"Napaka-arte!" Singhal niya.

At bago ko pa namalayan Dinuraan niya ako.

Tumama ang laway sa pisngi ko. Mainit. Marumi. Nakakahiya. Pero hindi ako gumanti. Hindi ako nagsalita. Hindi ako lumaban.

I just sank to the floor of the cell.

Niyakap ko ang tuhod ko," Malrick , nasaan ka na ba" I whispered.

Tatlong araw. Tatlong araw na ako sa kulungan. Para na akong baliw. Nakatingin lang sa rehas, nagaabang.

Sa kanya. Siya lang ang meron ako. Sa lalaking akala ko, mamahalin ako kahit ano pa ang mangyari.

Si Malrick. Umiiyak ako habang iniisip kung paano siya papasok dito , galit ang mukha dahil hindi ako kumakain. Nagagalit kasi iyon pag di ako kumain. Napahikbi ako.

Apat na araw. I was weak. I didn't want to eat. Wala akong gana. Nahilo ako.

Naka-dapa lang ako sa sahig, sa ibabaw ng lumang karton. Parang wala na akong katawan—parang kaluluwa na lang akong naghihintay mabulok.

Nakatingin ako sa lubid. Sa lubid na tinatago ko sa ilalim ng lumang bangko.

I was molested. by Mr. Solavan.
I killed Don Valtar. I held the syringe. I injected it. And now he's gone.

I am a prisoner. Wala na akong kinabukasan. Hindi na ako makakapagtapos.

I closed my eyes.

And in the silence of this cell, surrounded by peeling paint and iron bars—

I thought of death.

I just want to die.

Just like the others.
Just like the prisoners who gave up.

Maybe they were right. Maybe that's the only way to end this pain.

"No..."

"Hindi puwede..."
"Baka puntahan ako ni Malrick dito bukas." I said it so softly, parang bulong sa hangin. Parang dasal ng isang nawawalan ng dahilan pero pilit pa ring kumakapit.

"B-Baka busy lang... sa burol ni Don Valtar..." I whispered to myself, voice barely a breath. "Baka busy lang..." I nodded, slow and weak—trying to convince my own heart to stop breaking.

But deep inside, something ached.
Something sharp. If he really cared... wouldn't he have come by now?

But I shook that thought away—
No. Malrick is not like that. He loves me.

I pulled my knees closer to my chest, resting my chin on them, tears quietly slipping down my cheeks.

"He'll come tomorrow... maybe."

I closed my eyes. One more day. Kaya ko pa siguro 'yon. Para sa kanya.

Because as long as I believe he might come...

I have to stay.

"Suarez, may bisita ka." sabi ng pulis sa sakin
kinabukasan Napatingala ako. My heart stopped. Then, bumilis ang tibok.

I got up immediately.Malrick. Baka si Malrick.Ang mahal ko. Nandito.

Tumayo ako kahit nanghihina pa. Nilabanan ko ang hilo. Hinaplos ko ang mukha ko para matuyo ang luha.
I tried to fix my hair. Tried to look... like someone still worth loving.

I followed the guard to the receiving area, my hands trembling, my

feet unsure.

Pag-abot ko sa receiving area, bumuhos ang luha. Umalis na ang mga pulis.
Napaluhod ako. Wala na akong lakas. Para akong batang nawalan ng tahanan.

"M-Mother Superior..." I sobbed hard as I knelt and hugged her knees. She's here. May pamilya pa ako. May isang taong di pa bumitaw.

"D-Diyos ko, anak..." Mahinang bulong niya habang yumuko, pilit akong pinatayo.

Pero ayaw ko.

Ayaw ko. Doon lang ako nakayakap, umiiyak, parang bata. Ayaw kong pakawalan 'yung init ng katawang matagal kong hinanap. Yung amoy ng chapel. Yung lambing ng kamay niyang minsang humaplos sa buhok ko tuwing nagkakasakit ako

"A-anak... tumayo ka, ha? Hindi... h-hindi galit si Mother Superior sa'yo..." Umiling lang ako, as I cried hard mas lalong humigpit ang yakap ko sa tuhod niya.

Ayokong bumitaw. Ayokong mawala ulit 'yung yakap na 'yon. Ayokong magising kung panaginip lang 'to.

Sister Luna slowly sat on the floor beside me and gently pulled me into her arms.

I buried my face into her and cried hard—as if I'd been waiting for this hug my entire life.

"S-Sister... n-nakap-patay po ako... napatay ko si Don..." My voice cracked as the tears poured down again.

Sister Luna cried too, but she nodded softly, saying nothing as she ran her fingers through my tangled hair.

"Ilalabas ka namin dito, Sol..." she whispered as she wiped my tears with the edge of her sleeve.

Then I felt it, trembling hand of Mother Superior.

Hinawakan niya ang kamay ko. Mainit. Mahina. Nanlalambot.

Nakita ko ang luha niya, dumulo sa mata niya, at dahan-dahang

tumulo... diretso sa mga kamay naming magkahawak.

"M-Magsasampa ng k-kaso ang mga Dermirian.....M-malakas ang kapit nila. Nagnakaw ka raw... at pinatay si Don." She nodded through her grief. And all I could do was cry harder like a child.

Because I knew what she was saying was real.
And I couldn't even defend myself. I couldn't tell them I was molested.

I couldn't say it out loud.I'm too ashamed. Too dirty. Too broken.

"Shhh..." Mother Superior cupped my face gently. "Hindi ako naniniwala."

"Kilala kita. Hindi mo magagawa 'yon. Hindi mo kayang magnakaw at pumatay" She wiped every tear with her thumb ,,slow, loving, and certain.

"Dahil ayaw mong m-may masaktang tao..." she whispered as a tear fell down.

And for the first time... I believed it too.

She kissed my hand soft, trembling then slid a small, folded piece of paper into my palm.

"M-Magpakalayo ka..." Her voice broke. Napahikbi ako. I looked up at her, eyes wide with fear and confusion.

"P-Puntahan mo ang lugar na 'to," she whispered, barely able to speak through her sobs.
"H-Hanapin mo si... si Moning...sa Mindanao" She was crying so hard —she could barely talk properly anymore.

But her hands held mine with so much strength, like she was trying to transfer every last ounce of her faith into me.

"Mother Superior..." Umiling ako habang bumabagsak ang mga luha ko.
"H-Hindi ko ho yata kaya... napakalayo ng M-Mindanao..."

But she looked me in the eyes, firm but soft, holding my face like I was still that little girl she raised.

"Ssshhh... Kaya mo. K-kaya mo, anak. Napalaki kitang malakas." She

whispered, her voice shaking, I nodded slowly, sobbing as I clung to her hands like a lifeline.

"At 'wag..." Then her voice cracked a sharp sob escaped her lips.

"At 'wag ka nang bumalik dito."

Napasinghap ako. At napahikbi
But she held her ground, her eyes red and wet, filled with love and fear.

"Hindi nakalimot ang mga Dermirian. H-hindi sila titigil."

I cried hard—because I knew... this was goodbye.

And maybe forever.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 34

Tumawag sa akin ang isang pulis. Tahimik ang paligid. Tulog na ang lahat ng kasamahan ko sa kulungan. Hatinggabi na.

"Suarez," bulong niya. "Sumama ka sa akin. 'Wag kang magpapahalata." Hindi ako nagtanong. Hindi ako nagdalawang-isip. Ito ang tinutukoy ni Mother superior.

Tahimik kaming naglakad sa madilim na hallway, hanggang makarating kami sa fire exit.
Wala ni isang tunog maliban sa tunog ng puso kong kumakabog.

"Dumaan ka sa gubat. Pangatlong puno mula sa kanan, may bag doon. Kunin mo."

"Bilisan mo! " Napatakbo ako. Hindi ko alam kung anong mangyayari sa akin. Habang tumatakbo ako, naririnig ko na mula sa likod...

Nagkakagulo na sa presinto.

"May nakatakas!"

"Preso! Nakatakas ang preso!" Pero hindi na ako lumingon,

My bag was prepared by Mother Superior. May damit. May pera. May pag-asang pilit kong pinanghahawakan.

I hurried toward the bus station, nagmamadali, lumilingon sa bawat kanto. Baka may makakita pa sa akin. Baka habulin nila ako. Baka... tapusin nila ang pagtakas ko bago pa magsimula.

Nang makasakay ako ng bus, napaiyak ako. Tahimik. Malalim. Nanginginig.

"Para saan ka, Ineng?" Tanong ng konduktor, habang sinisingil.

"Pa-Lanao Del Norte po." I handed him the fare with shaky hands. Tatlong araw ang biyahe. 8:00 AM, umalis ang bus. Gusto kong matulog. Wala akong tulog sa kulungan. Sa gulo. Sa iyak.

Pero kada pikit ng mata ko—

Si Malrick ang nakikita ko. M-Malrick... Sabi mo hindi mo ako iiwan.

Sabi mo mamahalin mo ako, kahit sa mahirap na panahon. Asan ka ngayon? Nangako ka sa'kin. Nangako ka. Tinakpan ko ang mukha ko ng tshirt.

I just sobbed hard. Dahil Tanngina, kahit masakit... maghihintay ako sa kanya. Kaya ko siyang hintayin, kahit gaano pa katagal.

Kasi nangako ako. Nangako akong magtitiwala sa pangako niya.

At kahit hindi ko na alam kung totoo pa 'yon... Kahit wala na siyang salita ni anino sa akin...

Kakapit pa rin ako.

Because my love for him is what I carry with me baon ko sa bawat hakbang, kasama ng mga anak namin.
Kahit dinurog ako ng pagmamahal na 'to,
it somehow gives me the reason to move forward.

A love that holds me together...
even when everything else is falling apart.

Dumating ako sa Maranding, Lanao del Norte Terminal na parang masusuka na ako. Sa haba ng biyahe... Hindi ako sanay. Hindi ako sanay sa ganitong layo o sa ganitong bigat.

"Ate, saan ho dito ang papuntang Brgy. Pinuyak?"

"Diyan lang, Ning. Sa may mga single motor."

"Salamat ho."

Bago ako naglakad papunta ro'n, dumiretso muna ako sa botika. May kutob na ako. Pero gusto kong makasigurado. Pagkabili ko, dumiretso ako sa public restroom. Nanginginig ang kamay ko habang binubuksan ang test kit.

Pagtingin ko sa resulta...

"Tangina..." I whispered, my knees almost giving in. Dalawang linya.

Tumulo ang luha ko. Tahimik. Mabigat.

"Uh, papuntang Pinuyak po?" tanong ko sa isang driver ng single motor.

"Saan sa Brgy. Pinuyak, Ineng?"

Kinuha ko ang papel na iniabot sa akin ni Mother Superior.
"Sa Sitio Kaymito po... kina Nanay Moning."

"Sige. Tara."

Mahigit apat na oras ang byahe mula sa lungsod. Makitid ang kalsada. Matirik. Palayaan ang nakikita ko kahit saan .Parang buhay ko ngayon madulas, madilim, at walang kasiguraduhan.

Pumikit ako. Dinama ko ang hangin. May kung anong pamilyar dito kaparehong hangin sa hacienda nina Malrick.

Ang hangin ng alaala.
Ng pagmamahal.
Ng sakit.

MONTHS LATER

Tinatanaw ko ang malawak na palayan sa harap ko. Maganda. Tahimik. The wind felt cool. The sun wasn't harsh on my skin. Pero habang nakatitig ako, may mabigat sa dibdib ko. I couldn't tell if it was sadness... or shame.

May mga magsasakang nag-aararo. Their clothes were soaked in sweat. Mud clung to their shoes, and their hands trembled from exhaustion. Yet they smiled. As if sanay na sila. As if it's normal for their backs to nearly break from work, while people in the city complain over the smallest things.

And me? I was just standing there, watching them. I didn't know if I should admire them or feel ashamed. Kasi sila, kahit pagod, they can still smile. But me? Kahit maliit na abala lang, I already want to give up.

I closed my eyes when I breathed in the fresh air and heard the chirping of birds. Peace. Finally. But I kept them shut... and that's when I felt it. Parang may tumama sa balakang ko nang hindi ko inaasahan.

"N-Nanay Moning! Naaayyy! Manganganak na ho yata ako!" Napaluha ako at hindi ko na kayang itago ang pangamba. Dito lang ako manganganak sa bahay. Walang doktor. Walang kama. Walang gamot..

Ang ospital? Apat na oras pa bago marating ang lungsod, at kahit gustuhin man naming pumunta, wala rin kaming pera. I closed my eyes, but not to relax or calm down,only to avoid seeing what I feared the most. Losing my life... or worse, losing my baby.

Every wave of pain felt like a knock on death's door, a reminder that no matter how strong I am, some things are simply beyond my control.

God, please... not now. Not here. Not like this. I was shaking from the pain. Another wave hit, parang may humahaplos sa bituka ko gamit ang blade.

"Tasyong!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning habang nagmamadaling kumuha ng kumot. "Ihanda ang mainit na tubig at palanggana, manganganak na si Inday Sol!

They moved quickly. Soaked towels in hot water and placed them on my belly. It was warm. Comforting. But the pain didn't lessen not even a little.

I was an intern nurse. I was supposed to know how to handle things like this. Supposed to stay calm. Supposed to be ready.
But right now? I was just scared. I didn't have anyone else here. Just Nanay Moning and Tatay Tasyo and even if they tried their best, this wasn't something warm water and old prayers could fix.

"Day Solana, uminom ka nitong hilaw na itlog para hindi mahirapan lumabas ang bata," sabi ni Nanay Moning, hawak-hawak ang baso na nanginginig na rin.Hindi na ako nagtanong. Wala na akong lakas.

Ganito rin ang ginawa ng ilang taga-rito nang sila'y manganak. Sana effective. Kahit hindi ako naniniwala, kahit may duda pa rin ako sa loob, tinanggap ko.

Kasi sa ngayon... kaunting pag-asa lang ang meron ako. At kapit na ako doon.Manganganak ako dito nang walang anesthesia. Kaya sana, umepekto 'yung hilaw na itlog. Kahit papaano. Kahit kaunti.

"Naaayyyyy, lalabas na ho yata!"

Dali-dali nila akong tinulungan para makahiga sa banig. The bed was made of bamboo, with some blankets placed on top para kahit papaano'y maging comfortable. The towels were ready... pati na rin ang mga dahon na hindi ko naman kilala. I didn't know if they were medicine or part of a prayer, pero hindi na ako nagtanong.

As long as the baby comes out. As long as they're safe. As long as both of us... survive.

Right now, I'm placing my trust in Nanay Moning. Siya ang kilalang tagapaanak dito sa aming sitio. I had no one else to rely on but her.

"Inday, nakikita ko na ang ulo ng bata. Sige, ire ka, anak!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning, habang pinipigilan ang kaba sa boses niya. Para akong malalagutan ng hininga. Parang may pwersang humahati sa katawan ko.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" Napasigaw ako. Napakasakit. Masakit na parang hindi na matatapos.

"Arggggghhhhhhhh!"

It felt like my body was being torn open from the inside. The pain was sharp, deep, and wild, like fire crawling through every nerve in my spine and gut. My hips felt like they were being pried apart, my lower back felt like it would snap. My breath hitched. My vision blurred.

I was shaking. I wanted to scream louder, but even my voice was tired.

Still, I pushed. I had to.

"Nakita ko na ang ulo! Sige, isang iri na lang!" sigaw ni Nanay Moning.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Then suddenly. I heared a cry. A loud, clear, beautiful cry.

"Inday Sol! Lalaki! Malusog! Abay napaka gwapo naman nitong baby namin!" But Nanay Moning's face changed. She looked down again.

"Inday, umiri ka pa. May isa pa!" Twins. My heart skipped a bit. My body wanted to give up. But I clenched my jaw.

"One more," I whispered to myself, I'm barely holding on. I sobbed, quiet at first, then louder, until my whole body shook.

"Nanay, parang hindi ko na yata kaya" ani ko as I closed my eyes.

"Nanay Moning... parang hindi ko na yata talaga kaya," I whispered, my voice trembling, caught between a sob and a scream. That wasn't just pain speaking, it was defeat.

Parang may mabigat na pinto na unti-unting sumasara sa loob ko. My strength was slipping through the cracks. Ang bawat iri, parang hinuhugot ang kaluluwa ko.

Tumingala ako. Everything was spinning. Naalala ko agad si Malrick. Hindi ko napigilang maiyak.

Malrick... Malrick, kailangan kita. Kailangan na kailangan kita ditoooo. Sabi mo hindi mo ako pababayan. Sabi mo hindi mo ako iiwan.

Habang humihikbi ako,pinilit kong magpakatatag , pero ang puso ko, parang gusto nang sumuko. Gusto kong marinig ang boses niya. Gusto kong siya 'yung humawak sa kamay ko habang pinagdadaanan ko 'to.

Pero wala siya. Wala siya dito, kahit anino.

Ako lang. Ako, si Nanay Moning, at ang kirot na parang walang katapusan. Nanay Moning leaned closer, her hands firm but gentle on my shaking legs, a rosary wrapped tightly around her fingers. A rosary, I suddenly remembered Mother superior. Napahikbi ako ng malakas.

"Kaya mo pa, anak. Konti na lang ha. Konti na lang talaga," she whispered. May tumulong luha sa mata niya, pero pinunasan lang niya ito ng likod ng kamay. Her voice didn't shout. It didn't command.

"One last... push..." I whispered

"ARGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH ahhhhhhhh argghhhhhhhhhh" I pushed. Isa... dalawa... tatlo , hanggang sa marinig ko ang iyak ng sanggol.

A baby. . . Alive. I made it, we made it. Pero hindi ko na maigalaw ang katawan ko.

Nakatingala lang ang mga mata ko sa kisame, nanginginig ang pilik-mata, habang unti-unti akong nilalamon ng pagod at takot. Naramdaman ko ang init ng dugong dumadaloy mula sa aking ibaba, malakas at mainit na kapareho ng luhang dumadaloy sa pisngi ko.

Nagdidilim na ang paningin ko. Parang unti-unti akong hinihila ng malamig na kamay sa isang lugar na walang ingay, walang ilaw, walang buhay.

Parang gusto na akong kunin ng paningin ko. Parang tinatawag na ako ng dulo. Pero ayoko. Hindi pwede..

Ayokong sumama. Ayokong mawala. Gusto kong sumigaw. Gusto kong tawagin si Nanay Moning. Gusto kong hawakan ang kamay niya at ipagpilitang.....

"Nanay... ayoko pa. Ayoko pang mamatay..."

Ang lalamunan koy tuyong-tuyo na. Ang katawan ko ay wala nang lakas. Pero ang puso ko? Puno pa rin ng takot... at pag-asa.

Gusto kong makita ang mga anak ko. Gusto kong mahawakan sila. Gusto kong marinig ang iyak nila habang gising pa ako.

Gusto kong masabi kay Malrick...
"Mahal, may kambal tayo. Buhay sila. Asan ka ba?"

At habang lumulubog ako sa dilim, isa lang ang paulit-ulit kong sinasambit sa isip ko.

"Panginoon... huwag pa po ngayon."

Napaiyak nalang ako. Hindi ko maitanggi—hanggang ngayon, naghihintay pa rin ako kay Malrick. Maraming nanligaw, kahit buntis ako. Maraming ibang tao na sinubukang punan ang puwang na iniwan niya. Pero hindi sila siya.

Kaya kung hindi rin lang naman siya... wag na lang.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 35

6 years after.

"Lando, pasensya na... pero hindi talaga ako tumatanggap ng manliligaw," sabi ko habang papasok sa bahay nina Nanay Moning.

"Bubuhayin ko ang mga anak mo, Solana," sagot niya, pilit. "Hindi mo na kailangan pang maglako."

"Salamat, Lando... pero kaya kong buhayin ang mga anak ko ng ako lang." Huminga ako nang malalim at nilingon siya, dahan-dahan.

"Hindi ko kailangan ng tagapagligtas. Ang kailangan ko, respeto." Tumahimik siya. Kita ko ang sakit sa mga mata niya, pero hindi ako umurong.

Tumahimik siya. Kita ko ang sakit sa mga mata niya, pero hindi ako umurong.
"Mabuti kang tao, Lando. Pero ang puso ko... hindi mo kailangang pilitin."

Pumasok ako sa bahay, hawak pa rin ang pinamili, habang ang bigat ng tanong niya ay naiwan sa hangin, hindi sinagot, pero malinaw ang sagot.

Anim na taon na ang lumipas. Anim na taon ng pananahimik at pagtatago. At sa wakas... tanggap ko na. Tanggap ko na na may mga sugat talagang hindi na kayang gamutin ng oras , na hinding-hindi na kami magkikita pang muli.

Hindi ko alam kung ikakagaan ba ng loob 'yon, o mas lalo lang nitong pinatitibay ang pait sa puso ko. At kung sakaling magkita man kaming muli... kahit sa pagkakataong hindi inaasahan, kahit sa sitwasyong hindi ko na kayang kontrolin, handa akong bayaran ang kasalanan ko.

Kasalanang... hindi ko ginawa. Si Simon. Napapikit na lang ako. Marami pa sana akong gustong isigaw, pero pagod na 'kong magsalita. Ang Diyos na ang bahala sa kanya. Sa lahat ng ginawa niya sa akin,

Naputol ang pag-iisip ko nang may biglang yumakap sa paanan ko.

"Nanay, bless po!" sabay na sabi ng dalawa, kalalabas lang mula sa pintuan.

They are my treasure. My strength. Valrick Virel and Marlic Viron. Ang mga anak kong dahilan kung bakit ako lumalaban.

"Nanay, marami pong naibenta?" tanong ni Marlic habang hinahalikan ko ang noo nila, isa-isa.

"Oo, kasi ang gwapo daw ninyong dalawa sabi ng mga suki ko " Tumawa si Marlic habang nagtutulakan sila ni Valrick, aliw na aliw sa biro ko.

Ang tawanan nila ang musika sa bahay na 'to, simpleng ingay na nagpapatahimik sa lahat ng sakit. They both inherited their father's face. Melrick's face. Mga mata, ilong, pati ngiti lahat, kopyang-kopya. Halos mamatay ako sa panganganak sa kanila, pero kahit isa, walang namana sa akin.

"Solana, lumalaki na ang mga anak mo," sabi ni Nanay Moning habang tinutupi ang mga damit.
"Kailangan na nilang mag-aral. Hindi p'wedeng hindi."

"Oho, Nay. Napagdesisyunan ko na ho." Huminga ako nang malalim. "Luluwas ako ng lungsod sa makalawa. Maghahanap ako ng matitirhan... kahit maliit lang. Basta malapit sa eskwelahan."

"Ahoyyyy! Mamimiss ko itong mga Amerikano na ito!" Kinurot niya ang pisngi ng dalawa habang tumatawa.

"Lolo Tasyong! Ouch! Si Lola kinukurot kami!" reklamo ni Malrick, pero may ngiti sa labi.

"Nanay, pwede po ba kaming mag-aral sa school na may slide at tsokolate?" tanong ni Valrick, sabik at inosente.

"Oo, anak. Basta mag-aaral kayong mabuti, bibili pa si Nanay ng chocolate sa birthday ninyo."

"Yay!" sabay silang tumalon sa tuwa, halos matumba si Nanay Moning.

"Nanay Moning, nakita niyo po ba ang wallet ko? Pupunta na ho ako sa bayan. Maghahanap na rin ako ng trabaho."

"Nako, palagi ka na lang nakalimot. Nandoon 'yan sa aparador, sa tabi ng pulang bag."

"Ayun nga po! Salamat, Nay."

Kinuha ko agad ito at nilapitan ang kambal.

"O, mag-behave kayo habang wala si Nanay, ha? Makinig kay Lola at kay Lolo." Hinalikan ko sila sa noo.

"Puwede po ba kaming maglaro sa labas pagkatapos kumain?" tanong ni Valrick habang yakap-yakap ang paa ko.

"Oo naman, basta tapos ang gulay niyo. Walang tinapon, ha?"

Sumakay na ako ng single motor papuntang lungsod. Sabi ni Aling Pasing, may bago raw tayong ospital doon. Susubukan ko. Baka tanggapin nila ako. Kahit anong position, basta may pagkakakitaan. May panggastos. May maibigay sa mga anak ko.

May experience naman ako. Hindi man ako graduate.

"Dito nalang ho ako manong, salamat ho" sabi ko sabay abot

"Dito na lang ho ako, Manong. Salamat ho," sabi ko sabay abot ng bayad.

Pagkababa ko, agad kong nasilayan ang malaking ospital sa harapan ko. Hindi ito kasing-sosyal ng mga ospital sa Maynila, walang mamahaling tiles, walang aircon sa labas.
Pero sa bayan ng Maranding, ito na ang pinakamalaki.

Tumindig ako nang maayos. Huminga ng malalim.

"Uh, good morning po. May hiring ho ba kayo rito?" tanong ko sa receptionist ng ospital.

"Yes, Ma'am. Good morning din po. Punta lang po kayo sa HR Department, second floor po."

"Salamat ho."

Pagdating ko sa HR Department, kumatok muna ako bago pumasok.

"Mag-aapply?" tanong agad ng HR officer, hindi man lang tumingin.

"Uh, yes po, Ma'am," sagot ko habang marahang naupo sa harap niya.

"Anong natapos mo?"

"Ahh... undergraduate po. Nursing."
Medyo tumigil ang oras ko sa pagitan ng sagot ko at ng sagot niya.

"Kahit anong posisyon na lang ho, Ma'am. Kahit sa linen, kahit sa ward. Gagawin ko po."

"Paparating ang bagong may-ari ng ospital galing Maynila," sabi ng HR habang tinitingnan ang papel ko.
"Gusto niya ng dalawang secretary para mabilis matapos ang trabaho. Ilalagay kita doon."

Nanlaki ang mata ko. Secretary? Ako?

"S-salamat po, Ma'am."

"Pwede ka nang magsimula sa Lunes," sabi ng HR, diretso pero hindi malamig.

"Sige po, maraming salamat po," sagot ko, halos hindi makapaniwala. Lumabas ako ng ospital na may bahagyang ngiti sa labi—hindi man buo, pero totoo.

Dali-dali akong naghanap ng maliit na apartment. Yung kasya kaming tatlo. Ako at ang mga anak ko.

LUNES

Nakapagluto na ako ng agahan, kaya ginising ko na ang kambal. Umiyak pa nga si Nanay Soling nung umalis kami kahapon. Sinabihan ko na lang siyang dalawin kami dito sa bayan kapag may panahon. Ngayon ang unang pasok ng mga bata sa eskwela at ngayon rin ang unang araw ko sa trabaho.

1:00 PM pa naman ang shift ko, at pang-umaga ang schedule ng kambal sa kinder, kaya sakto. Pumasok ako sa kuwarto nila at hinalikan ang kanilang noo.

"Gising na, mga damulag ko."

"Nanay, antok pa po..." reklamo ni Marlic habang bumaluktot pa sa kumot.

"Nako, magagalit si Ma'am kapag late kayo," kaya dali-dali silang bumangon. Napatawa ako at agad ko silang niyakap.

"Nanay, may slide po ba sa school?" tanong ni Marlic, ang mas madaldal sa kambal.
Si Valrick kasi, mas seryoso. Tahimik. Mapagmasid. Namana niya ito

ama niya.

"Oo, beh. Pero bawal maglaro kung hindi pa pinayagan ni Ma'am, ha?"

"May chocolate din po, Nanay?" tanong ulit ni Marlic habang inaayos ko ang bag nilang spider man.

Tinapik ko si Valrick, na unti-unting gumapang papunta sa higaan ko.

"Oo meron, beh. Kapag very good ka. Kaya dapat very good kayo palagi, ha?"

"Valrick, anak... wag na matulog ulit."

"Hindi po ako tulog, Nanay... close lang po eyes ko. Maingay lang po si Marlic." Napatawa na lang ako ulit.

Hinahatid ko sila sa kindergarten school na nasa sampung minutong lakad lang mula sa apartment.
Pagkatapos, paghahabilin ko sila kay Nanay Sally, ang matandang nakatira sa tapat ng apartment namin. Sinuswelduhan ko siya para bantayan ang kambal tuwing ako'y nasa ospital.

Kaya kailangan ko ng part-time job sa weekend. Para masigurong may pantustos kami—para sa renta, pagkain, at kinabukasan ng mga anak ko.

Before I went to the hospital, I sat in front of the small mirror hanging in my apartment. I stared at myself. What happened six years ago changed everything in me my attitude, my physical appearance.

Mahaba na ang buhok ko ngayon, straight and reaching down to my waist. Mas mahinhin na rin ako. Mas maingat. Parang kahit simpleng paghinga, pinag-iisipan ko na muna.

That old version of me, the loud, careless girl, was gone. And in her place stood someone shaped by pain, silence, and the weight of every memory I tried to bury.

Malipas ang isang lingo ko dito sa hospital marami akong naging kaibigan. Ngayon ang araw na darating ang may-ari ng ospital. Kaya narito kaming lahat sa function hall, mga offce staff lang. Walang medical staff.

Naupo kami ni Anna sa pinaka-dulo ng mesa. Katrabaho ko siya. Kaming dalawa ang Secretary din ng a bagong may ari. Mabait siya,

palatawa, at parang instant kaibigan.

"Ano daw ba pangalan ng may-ari? Baka mapahiya ako, hindi ko alam pangalan ng boss natin," tanong ko habang pinagmamasdan siyang kumakain ng cracklings. Ngumiwi ako. Masyadong maingay ang pagkaing 'yon para sa isang formal meeting.

"Nakalimutan ko, basta letter D daw 'yun," sagot niya habang ngumunguya pa.

"Letter D?"

"Oo. Maka-Daddy!" sabay tawa ng malakas. Napatawa rin ako.

"Grabe ka. Baka marinig ka ng HR," sabay sipat ko sa paligid.

"Eh totoo naman, 'di ba? Mayaman, mysterious, tapos laging naka-suit sa mga pictures. Aasawahin ko nga yon " pabiro niyang sabi

"Baka naman may asawa na," bulong ko.

"Wala raw. Pero may kasama laging isang babaeng doctor." sagot niya agad at nnapahagikhik. Tumango lang ako. Napatawa rin ako.

Ang gaan talaga ng loob ko kay Anna. Hindi niya alam na may dalawa na akong anak—pero hindi ko rin naman tinatago. Wala lang nagtatanong. Dalawang pahabang mesa ang inihanda. Ang una para sa mga department heads. Ang pangalawa, kung saan kami naka-upo para sa mga staff.

Nagkukuwentuhan lang kami ni Anna, tahimik pero masaya. Ako lang pala ang tahimik. Kasi 'yung bunganga niya, ang lakas tumawa, ang daldal pa. Tahimik lang ako. Nakikinig, tumatawa ng konti. Pero siya? Parang fiesta sa bawat sentence.

Hanggang sa biglang bumukas ang pinto. Napasinghap ako. Namutla ako. Parang may humigop ng lahat ng dugo sa katawan ko.

Tumigil ang lahat. Ang cracklings sa bibig ni Anna. Ang mahinang bulungan sa paligid.
Ang aircon na kanina'y ramdam ko sa batok wala na.

Pati tibok ng puso ko... parang nagpalit ng tunog.
Hindi na siya kaba. Takot na.

Diyos ko.
Hindi.

Hindi siya.
Hindi pwedeng siya.

Pero kahit hindi pa siya lumalapit,
kahit nakasuot siya ng bagong polo,
mas tumangkad,
mas tumalim ang tindig—

kilalang-kilala ko na ang lakad na 'yon. Yung lakad na parang alam niyang walang makakatalo sa kanya.

Si Simon yan okay? wag mag expect HAHAHAHHA

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 36

Kilalang-kilala ko na ang lakad na 'yon. Yung lakad na parang alam niyang walang makakatalo sa kanya.

'Yung lakad na dati kong minahal.

Si Malrick.

Nanuyo ang lalamunan ko. May humaplos na malamig sa batok ko, parang multo. Napahawak ako sa mesa, nanginginig ang daliri. Nais ko sanang tumayo, tumakbo, magtago, pero hindi ko magawa. Para akong pinako sa upuan.

At sa loob ng isang iglap bumalik lahat.

Lahat ng sakit. Lahat ng pangako. Lahat ng gabing umiiyak ako sa kulungan habang sinisigaw ang pangalan niya.

Siya.
Ang lalaking minahal ko ng lubos pa sa sarili ko. Ang lalaking iniwan ako sa impyerno.

Tumayo sila, ang isa't isa binati si Malrick. Kahit nanginginig ang binti ko, pinilit ko pa ring tumayo, lalabas ako. Hindi ko kaya—

lalo na't pumasok ang kasama niya at humawak sa braso ni niya . Parang tinusok ang puso ko. Wala man lang pag-aalinlangan. Walang pag-iwas. Hinayaan niyang hawakan siya. Jowa niya siguro si Ericka.

Sa lawak ng Pilipinas, talagang nagkita ang landas naming dalawa.

"Okay ka lang? Ba't para kang nakakita ng multo? Minulto ka ba ng mga gwapong kagaya ni Doc?" Anna whispered and chuckled lowly.

Kaya paunti-unti akong lumabas ng hall. I went straight to the comfort room, nanginginig.

Walang luha. Pagak akong natawa. Naubos na yata ang luha ko kakaiyak noong panahon na 'yon.

I just sat down in the cubicle, tulala.Nakalimotan ko ang oras. Labinlimang minuto na pala ako rito.

Dali-dali kong inayos ang sarili. Sout ko ang isang puting blouse at itim na pencil skirt I washed my face. I fixed my long hair. Pumunta ako sa highest floor. Nandoon ang office niya.

Paglabas ko ng elevator, nakita kong hindi mapakali si Anna. Nanlaki ang mata niya nang makita ako. Naglakad ako papunta sa table niya.

"Saan ka ba nagsusuot? Pinakilala tayo kanina, wala ka! Nagalit ang HR, gali na galit!" Bahagyang natigilan ako.

"N-Nandiyan ba sa loob si D-Doc? Puntahan ko na lang kaya?" Nauutal kong sabi

"Wag! Sabi ng HR, hintayin mo raw siya. Ipapakilala ka niya."

Hindi nagtagal, bumukas ang elevator at lumabas si Ma'am Gina. Matalas ang tingin sa akin, pero hindi na nagsalita. Kumatok muna siya bago pumasok.

Ang puso ko parang palabas na sa ribcage ko. Parang sasabog. Parang gusto kong maglaho.

Sumunod ako kay Ma'am Lorna.

"Good morning po, Dr. Demerian. Ito po ang pangalawang sekretarya niyo." she said politely.

Pero... Nakatungo lang ako. Parang na-lock yata ang spine ko. Hindi ko maitaas ang ulo ko.

"Umayos ka, baka masetante tayong dalawa rito," Ma'am Lorna hissed through gritted teeth,
halatang pilit ang ngiti niya habang nakaharap kay Doc.

Inangat ko ang mukha ko baka masetante pa kami. Pero pag-angat ko, hindi siya nag-iisa. Nandoon din si Ericka sa tabi niya, naka-lean sa table, parang may reports silang pinag-uusapan.

At suot niya ang puting coat.
Doctor na siya. I smiled sadly.

Girlfriend niya nga siguro. Kaya ba noon masama ang tingin niya sa akin?

Tumayo ng tuwid si Ericka at nanlaki ang mata. Para siyang nakakita ng multo nang makita ako. Parang biglang may bumagsak na yelo sa dibdib ko. Napaatras siya ng bahagya, hawak pa rin ang folder na

parang gustong itago ang sarili sa likod noon.

Hindi makagalaw. Hindi makahinga. Siya na ang unang umiwas ng tingin. Pero huli na. Nakita ko 'yung panginginig sa labi niya. Yung mabilis na paghinga. Yung takot. Guilt? O baka awa?

I smiled genuinely to her. Hindi ko naman aagawin.

Bumaling ako sa lalaking kausap niya. Tumigil ito sa pagsasalita, at saka tumingin din sa direksyon ko.

Hindi siya ngumiti. Hindi rin mukhang nagulat. Sinabi ba ng HR ang pangalan ko kanina? Baka nga., ang titig niya tahimik, malalim, parang sinusukat kung hanggang saan ko kayang tiisin.

"Uhh, good morning po, D-Dr. Dermirian... Dr. Ericka," I said, trying to sound calm. Napasinghap si Ericka. May takot sa mata niya.

Hindi ko alam kung konsensya 'yon o takot na masira ang pinaghirapan niya.

"I told you, Lorna," Ericka suddenly snapped,
"Do not hire an incompetent and unprofessional person that has criminal records."

Para akong binuhusan ng malamig na tubig.
B-Bakit... bakit sinabi niya 'yon sa harap ng ibang tao?

Nanlaki ang mata ni Ma'am Lorna at napatingin sa akin.
Nanliliit ako. Parang gusto kong maglaho.

"Po?" she asked, like she couldn't process what she just heard.

"That woman beside you was a criminal," he said like it was just another fact. Like saying the sky is blue.

"H-Hindi ko po alam, D-Doc. Pasensya na po... sisisihintahin ko na lang siya—" Pinutol siya ni Malrick.

Cold. Flat. Walang kahit anong emosyon.

"No need. I need a secretary ASAP. So I can go back to Manila "

Tumahimik ang paligid. Lahat naghintay sa susunod niyang sasabihin.

"Just strengthen the security of my hospital," aniya, malamig ang tono.

"We never know what she'll do this time." malamig ang tono pero ramdam ang bigat sa bawat salita

"You're all excused. I want a word with the new secretary" Dali-daling lumabas si Ma'am Gina, pinanlakihan pa ako ng mata bago tumalikod.

"Including you Dr. Santos " Parang napahiya si Dr. Ericka. Hindi na siya nagsalita—dali-dali siyang lumabas ng office.

Pinikit ko na lang ang mga mata ko at itinungo ang ulo. Kasi alam ko, hindi naman importante ang salita ko. Mahihintay na lang ako sa panahon na ako naman ang pakikinggan. Yung panahon na hindi ako huhusgahan bago pa man ako magsalita.

"I never knew you had a thick face, Suarez." Suarez... not Solana, nor even baby.

Ayaw kong imulat ang mga mata ko. Kasi alam ko pag ginawa ko 'yon, maiiyak ako.

Parang déjà vu. Parang kagaya noon.
Pero hindi na ako kagaya ng dati.

Noon, nagsasalita ako. Ngayon, tahimik na lang.

Kasi importante ang trabaho ko. Para sa mga anak ko. Kahit pagpunasin pa ako ng sahig ng buong ospital. Kahit duraan pa nila ako. Kahit tratuhin akong basahan.

Basta makauwi ako sa kanila, ng mga anak ko gabi-gabi.

"The audacity of you to work in my hospital, you criminal." Kinagat ko ang labi ko.

Para pigilan ang hikbi. Para hindi ako mapahagulhol sa harap niya. Kung ipapakulong man niya ako muli... Ihahatid ko na lang ulit ang mga bata kay Nanay Moning.

The scenario of me not seeing my twins anymore made my throat tighten. Napakagat ako sa labi, pilit pinipigilan ang emosyon. Pero hindi ko na kinaya hanggang sa may tumakas na hikbi.
Isang hikbing parang galing sa pinakailalim ng dibdib ko.

Ang sakit. Hindi ko alam kung paano mabubuhay sa mundong wala sila.

"You even fucking stole millions from my bank account." voice cold—not with fear, but with rage.

I just shook my head still bowed low. Hindi ko na napigilan. Tumulo ang luha ko. Bigla kong naalala ang mga kamay ni Mr. Solavan.

Yung haplos na hindi ko hiniling.
Yung gabi na binura ang pagkatao ko.

Ayoko nang balikan.
Ayoko nang maalala.
Hindi ko kaya.

He never knew I was molested.
Binaboy ako, Malrick. Gustto kong isigaw yon
Pero sa paningin niya... Kasalanan ko pa rin.

I nodded.
Sana...
Sana pinabayaan ko na lang si Mr. Solavan gawin ang gusto niya.
Sana nagpagahasa nalang ako

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 37

Hindi ko na alam kung paano natapos ang usapan namin. Basta lumabas na lang ako ng opisina, umiiyak. Kaya agad akong nilapitan ni Anna.

"Pinagalitan ka ba?"
Mas pa sa pinagalitan, Anna...
Pero tumango na lang ako. Walang lakas magsalita.

"Okay lang 'yan, parte ng trabaho ang mapagalitan." Sabay haplos niya sa braso ko, trying to comfort me. Pero hindi niya alam hindi lang trabaho ang iniiyakan ko.

Ni hindi ako inutusan ni Doc buong maghapon. Wala. Parang hangin lang ako sa paningin niya. Palaging si Anna ang tinatawag, Buong araw, nakatunganga lang ako sa gilid ng opisina— hindi ko alam kung nagtatrabaho pa ako o nakalutang lang.

My shift ended at 8 PM. Dali-dali akong lumabas ng ospital. Gusto ko ng makita ang kambal ko.
Pero bago pa man ako makatawid sa exit Naiwan ko ang susi ng apartment. Nasa ibabaw ng mesa sa ko.

Napabuntong-hininga ako. Wala na akong choice.
Bumalik ako.

Habang naghihintay ng elevator, nilalaro-laro ko ang strap ng bag ko. Bumukas ang pinto.

At ang mundo ko, parang natigil ulit.

Si Doc.
Kasama si Dra. Ericka, nakahawak sa braso niya. Wala na silang suot na white coat. Pauwi na.

Ang tawa ni Dra. Ericka ay nabitin sa ere.
Nagtagpo ang mga mata namin saglit, bago siya tumikhim at umiwas.

"Good evening po, Doc... Dra." Bahagya akong yumuko. Tumuloy sana sila palabas. Pero—

"Go ahead to the car, Dra. I forgot something in my office" He looked straight at me. I swallowed hard.

"O-okay, Doc. I'll just wait." May kaba sa boses ni Dra. Ericka. Hindi siya makatingin ng diretso sa akin.

Hindi niya kailangang matakot.
Hindi ko naman aagawin ang kahit anong sa kanya.

"What the fuck are you waiting for, Suarez?" Nanlaki ang mata ko. Parang takot na pusa, dumikit ako sa pader ng elevator at pumasok.

"Where do you live now?" Matulis ang boses niya. Pinagmasdan niya ako, parang sinusuri ang kaluluwa ko.

"Po?" Bahagyang umangat ang tingin ko, pero agad ding yumuko.

"I knew you heard it. You just play numb and innocent."

Ayun na naman siya.
Parang gusto niyang hukayin lahat ng sakit ko at ibato pabalik.

Napakapit ako sa strap ng bag ko, halos mapigtas.

"Sa apartment po... Saavedra Street," mahinang tugon ko.

"Apartment?" Tumawa siya, malamig.

"My millions weren't enough for you to buy a property?" May sarcasm sa bawat salita. Parang patalim.

Napapikit ako.
Hindi ko na kayang lumuha... Pero bakit parang naiiyak na naman ako? Thank God. Bumukas ang elevator.

Dali-dali akong lumabas. Kinuha ko ang susi sa mesa, pero ramdam kong dumaan siya sa likod ko tumagos ang lamig sa balat ko. Pumasok siya sa opisina.

Kaya tumakbo agad ako pabalik sa elevator.
Pilit pinipindot ang "1st Floor" na parang may hahabol. Halos masira ko na ang button kakapindot.

Malrick.
Napangiti ako nang malungkot.Umiling ako habang pilit inaalis sa isipan ang mga pangako niyang binitiwan noon. Ayoko na. Tapos na ako.

"Aling Sally, nandito na po ako." Sabi ko sabay katok sa pinto.

"Solana, nand'yan ka na pala. Heto, nakatulog na silang dalawa kakalaro." May lambing sa boses ni Aling Sally habang binuksan niya ang pinto.

"Ako na po ang bahala, Aling Sally. Maraming salamat po." Tahimik akong pumasok. Binuhat ko sila isa-isa, Una si Marlic, mahigpit ang yakap ko sa kanya. Sumunod si Valrick, inilapit ko sa dibdib ko at hinalikan sa noo.

"Good night, mga anak." Mahina kong bulong, habang pinagmamasdan ang maliliit nilang mukha—

Nagbihis akong dahan-dahan at nahiga sa pagitan nila.Sa wakas, kahit papano, may katahimikan. Yumakap ako sa kanila, mahigpit, na para bang kung bibitaw ako...
baka tuluyang gumuho ang mundo ko.

"Nanay, kahapon hindi very good si Kuya!" Sumbong ni Marlic habang kumakain kami ng agahan.

"Bakit naman, beh? Diba sabi ko dapat very good kayo para hindi magalit si Ma'am?" Sabi ko habang pinupunasan ang bibig ni Marlic.

"Eh nanay, sabi kasi ni Ma'am, mag-drawing ng family. Si Kuya... hindi nag-drawing ng tatay." Napahinto ako. Natigilan. Parang may kung anong tumusok sa dibdib ko.

Napasinghap ako, bahagyang umangat ang tingin ko kay Valrick.

"Wala naman tayong daddy talaga..." Sabi ni Valrick, bahagyang namumula ang mata, pilit pinipigilan ang luha.

"Meron! Nakita ko 'yung picture sa cabinet ni Nanay! Diba, Nay?" Singit ni Marlic habang ngumunguya ng kalabasa.
Nanlaki ang mata ko. Itong batang ito talaga...

"Kapareho pa nga tayo ng eyes, tayong tatlo." Dagdag pa niya, inosente pero siguradong-sigurado.

"Talaga, Nanay?" Sabi ni Valrick. Nabuhayan ang mukha. May konting pag-asa sa boses.

"Baka malate na tayo, bilis na ang kain, beh." Sabi ko kahit alam kong maaga pa. Pero syempre, kung gaano katigas ang ulo ni Malrick noon... ganoon din katigas ang ulo ng mga anak niya.

"Pero Nanay, gusto ko makita 'iyon." Sabi ni Valrick. I sighed and tried to stay calm.

"Sabi ko sayo same tayo tatlo ng eyes." Marlic whispered, sabay turo sa larawang hawak niya.

"Akin na. Malelate na tayo, magagalit na si Ma'am."
Hinawi ko ang buhok nila habang inaayos ang uniporme.

Ngumiti si Valrick. Isang ngiti na parang 'yon na ang bumuo ng araw niya

"Nanay pag ba naging very good kami , magpapakita si Tatay? nag work siya nanay sa malayo? ganoon kasi ang Tatay ni Tiboy"

Parang may bumara sa lalamunan ko. Tumango ako ng dahan dahan

"Oo, kaya dapat very good kayo lagi , Wag malikot kay Ma'am " I said as I kissed them.

Pagdating ko sa hospital, ramdam ko agad ang tensyon.
"Kriminal naman pala 'yan."
"Dapat kinulong 'yan."
"Nako! Pa-inosente pa e!"

Mga bulungan na parang mga karayom sa tenga ko. Hindi na ako nag-react. Sanay na akong husgahan.

Pagpasok ko ng elevator, ini-expect ko na si Anna ay magiging malamig sa akin.
Pero hindi.

"Solana, nandito ka pala. Halika, may ibibigay ako sayo, hopia. Masarap 'to."

"Hopia? 'Yung bilog?" Tanong ko habang pumapasok.

"Oo, galing kasi Cebu si Nanay. O, ito." Binigay niya ang tatlong box ng hopia. Napatawa ako sa gulat.

"Bat ang dami naman nito, Anna?" napasinghap ako

"Wala 'yan. Mas marami sa amin." Napahagikhik siya. Gaan ng loob ko sa kanya. At sa gitna ng lahat ng sakit at bigat... ang simpleng kabutihan niya, naging panandaliang lunas.

Pagbalik ko sa mesa, wala akong ginagawa. Tulad kahapon—hindi pa

rin ako pinapansin ni Doc. Para lang akong hangin sa ospina niya.

Hanggang sa biglang—
"Come to my office. Now." Tumunog ang intercom. Boses ni Doc.

Napatalon ako. Nagkatinginan kami ni Anna. Napatigil siya sa pagkain ng hopia.

Tahimik akong tumayo, nanginginig ang kamay. Dahan-dahang naglakad papunta sa opisina niya, habang pinipilit kong hindi muling gumuho.

Kumatok muna ako bago pumasok.

"G-Good morning po, Doc." Hindi man lang siya tumingin. Nakatuon ang atensyon sa laptop niya.

"I sent you a file. Print those. Stamp each page. I want it finished before 3 today." Diretso. Walang emosyon. Para akong tau-tauhang iniutosan. Pero kahit ganun, halos magsisigaw ako sa loob ko—sa wakas, may ginawa na ako. Hindi na ako tunganga.

"S-sige po, Malrick—" Tumikhim ako, napahiya.
"D-Doc, sige po." at lumabas na ako lunch na din Gutom na ako kaya bumaba muna ako sa cafeteria. Libre kasi 'yun para sa staff. Pero pagpasok ko pa lang,

Mga bulungan. Mga sulyap. Mga tingin na parang tumatagos sa balat ko.

"Kriminal 'yan 'di ba?"
"Mukhang inosente pero may bad record."

I sighed. Wala na akong gana. Bumalik ako sa table ko. Kinuha ko na lang ang beef loaf na de lata mula sa drawer ko at tahimik na bumaba sa fire exit. Doon ako naupo sa isang gilid at kumain—walang ingay, walang kahit sino. Tahimik.

Hanggang sa hindi ko namalayan... nakatulog pala ako.

Nagising ako 2 PM na.

"Tangina!" Napatalon ako. Dali-dali akong bumalik sa office . Sinalubong ako ni Anna habang busy siya sa computer niya.

"Si Doc?" tanong ko.

"May meeting siya. Babalik daw siya ng 3." Napalunok ako.

Binuksan ko agad ang file. 800 pages. Halos maiyak ako sa harap ng printer. Tatlong oras? Impossible.

Napatuwid ako ng upo nang marinig ko ang intercom. 150 pages pa lang.

"Bring the files to my office." Boses niya.

Napapikit ako.
Bahala na.

Hindi pa man ako nakakabawi ng hininga, itinapon niya ang papel sa mukha ko. Napapikit ako. Nasinghap.

"Do you know what these files are? These are proposals—urgent proposals needed now." His voice echoed in the room, cold and sharp

"N-nalimutan ko po, D-Doc—" My voice cracked

"Of course. What else do I expect from an undergraduate like you?" His voice was full of disdain. Parang tinadtad ang puso ko ng paulit-ulit. Hindi ako nakatingin. Nakatungo lang ako, habang umaagos ang luha ko. Tahimik. Buo.

"T-Tatapusin ko Today Doc" Pilit kong binuo ang boses ko kahit naglalaban ang takot at kahihiyan sa loob ko

"Get the fuck out of my office."

5:00 PM- 250 pages. Pakiramdam ko, hindi na kamay ko ang gumagalaw—parang makina na lang ako.

"Matagal pa ba 'yan, Solana? Mauna na ako ha?" tanong ni Anna habang nag-aayos ng gamit.

"Sige, Anna. Walang problema. Kita na lang tayo bukas." Pinilit kong ngumiti.

8:30 PM. Nakaka-500 na ako sa susunod na batch. Nagtext ako kay Aling Sally, "Magagabihan po ako Nay. Pakikiss po muna sila Marlic at Valrick."

Napasighap ako ng bumukas ang pinto.

Si Malrick.

Nagulat siya, paramh hindi niya inaasahan na nandito pa ako. Kita ko ang gulat sa pag-nganga niya ng bahagya. Pero agad din siyang bumawi, umayos ng tindig. Walang emosyon sa mukha.

"Uh... Goodbye po, Doc," sabi ko habang bahagyang yumuko, saka bumalik sa pag-aasikaso ng printer. Naglakad lang ito. Walang salitang lumabas mula sa kanya.

Ilang minuto pa, nag-error ang printer. Napapikit ako sa inis. Kinuha ko ang hopia na ibinigay ni Anna, nilagay sa bibig ko ang isang bilog.

Lumapit ako para i-check ang printer. Naiirita na ako, papaluin ko na sana—

Nang biglang Bumukas ang elevator.

Napalingon ako. Si Malrick. Naka-kunot ang noo.

"Yes, Berto. I forgot my car keys," narinig kong sabi niya sa phone.

Berto. Napangiti ako ng bahagya.

Bahagya akong yumuko para i-acknowledge ang presensya ni Doc. Hindi ako makapagsalita—may hopia pa sa bibig ko.

Napansin ko ang tingin niya. Tinitigan niya ang hopia sa kamay ko. Tumigas ang panga niya.

Pagkapasok niya sa office, pinukpok ko kaagad ang printer. Gumana. I smirked. Sumandal ako sa mesa.

700 pages nang Bumukas ulit ang pinto ng office ni Doc. Napatuwid agad ako ng upo. Napalunok. Agad akong tumayo.

Lumabas siya. Tahimik.

"Goodbye po, Doc," sabi ko sabay bahagyang yuko

I was humming a soft tune, trying to keep myself awake, when the elevator dinged open again.

Lumabas si Malrick.

"Uh... hello po ulit, Doc," I greeted, voice small feeling unsure.

He didn't respond directly. Instead, he spoke into his phone, sharp and clipped.

"Yes, Berto. I forgot my coat in the office." Weird. pangalawang balik na yon

11:00 PM. Masaya na ako natapos ko rin sa wakas.

Napasuntok ako sa ere sa sobrang saya at pagod. I arranged the stack of files neatly on my table, para bukas ready na. I carried my small bag and the box of Hopia Anna gave me, then rushed toward the elevator.

Just as I was about to press the button, Malrick came in again. Humihingal pa siya—parang nagmadaling bumalik.

He stepped in beside me. I stood still, holding the Hopia awkwardly in front of me. Napansin ko ang tingin niya doon.

Baka gutom siya.

"Uh... H-Hopia ho, Doc," I said, awkwardly lifting my hand, offering it.

He didn't take it. Instead, his eyes turned cold as he stared at the elevator's reflection.

"You're fucking selling in my hospital again, Suarez?" I froze.

"H-hindi po, Doc! G-galing po itong Cebu" His jaw tensed. Eyes sharp.

"The hell I care."

I bit my lip and closed my eyes briefly.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 38

Sabado ngayon. Sinabihan ako ni Anna na naglalako ng mango tapioca ang tiyahin niya. Kaya sinubukan ko rin. Malaki raw ang kita. Sayang rin kung palalampasin. Kaya heto kami ngayon sa Mabuhay Road. Mainit. Maingay. Masikip. Mandalas ang traffic dito, pero ayos lang

Naka-sampung benta na ako. Hindi ko mapigilan ang ngiti ko. Kahit mainit, tagaktak ang pawis ko, okay lang. Basa na ang likod ko, nanlalagkit na ang leeg, pero wala akong reklamo

Nakakita ako ng isang mamahaling itim na sasakyan, parang SUV. Pinuntahan ko na baga. Lumapit ako agad, hawak-hawak ang cooler. Baka sakali.

Mga 5 kasi kaming nabibinta. Kanya-kanyang diskarte.

Kinatok ko ang tinted window pero nanlumo ako ng makitang si Malrick and si Ericka. Parang may kumalabog sa dibdib ko. Nanlamig ang palad ko. Gusto ko na lang maglaho.

Pero mas gusto ko na lang magpalamon ng lupa noong may napasinghap sa likuran

Berto.

Hindi ko alam kung matutuwa ako o matutunaw sa hiya.

"Uh... mango tapioca po, 120 isa." Napahilaw ako ng ngiti. Malrick eyed me dangerously and looked my sweaty forehead. Parang sinuri niya ang bawat butil ng pawis ko. Nakakahiya.

Kaya dumistansya ako ng kaunti sa sasakyan niya, hinahaplos ang pawis.

"Lima sa akin, Nurse Solana," Berto said happily, ng makabawi. He opened the backseat tinted windows kaya lumakad ako papunta doon.

I am very happy to see him. He's very kind to me, easy back then. Isa siya sa mga kakaunting mabait sa akin noon.

"Berto! Nako! Solana na lang. Hindi kasi ako naka-graduate." Ngumiti ako nang totoo. Sa wakas, may isa pa ring hindi nakakalimot.

I smiled genuinely to him. Sana alam niyang totoo ang ngiting 'yon.

I saw his eyes became red.
Parang naiiyak siya. At ako... biglang kinurot ng alaala. Parang papaiyak as he handed me 1000-peso bill.

"Nako, wala ako manukli, Berto. Bale 600 lahat."

"Nonono, sa'yo na sukli, Nurse Solana."

"Talaga? Salamat Berto!"

Ramdam na ramdam ang saya sa loob ko. Minsan lang ako makatanggap ng ganyang kabutihan.

Tumikhim si Malrick kaya dali-daling nagpaalam si Berto sa akin. I waited a couple seconds pero wala nang bibili kaya napangiti ako at umatras.

Ericka, who's in front of me, didn't bother to look at me. Parang wala lang ako. I don't know why he feel so scared when I'm around. Walang wala ako sa kanya. Ni hindi ko nga alam kung bakit siya naiilang. Ako nga itong dapat matakot.

I put the basket sa stool chair na dala-dala ko and happily counted the money
Sa wakas, may kita ako. Parang ang gaan sa pakiramdam. Nang—

"How much was that again?" Biglang nanlamig ang batok ko.

I panicked. Pag-angat ko ng tingin, si Malrick. Parang biglang tumigil ang paligid.
Nahulog ang limang piso coin kaya kinuha ko muna bago siya sinagot. Nanginginig ang kamay ko, pilit pinapakalma.

"120 isa ho, D-Doc." Bakit ba ako nauutal?

"How many bottles left?" Matigas ang boses niya. Walang emosyon. Parang negosyo lang.

"Sampo ho, Doc." Pinipilit kong tumayo ng maayos, kahit parang nanghihina ang tuhod ko.

"I'll buy them all," he said as he drummed his finger on the wheel.

"Po?" Parang hindi ko agad narinig nang tama.

"Berto likes it. He told me to buy again."

Pero parang may alinlangan sa boses niya. Hindi ko alam kung sincere o napipilitan lang.

"O-okay po. Sige ho, Doc. Balutin ko lang." Mabilis akong kumilos, kahit pawisan at hulas. Kumuha ako ng eco bag at nilagay ang mga bote.
Bakit ba kasi ang init. Bakit ba ngayon pa siya lumapit.

"Bale 1200 ho lahat, Doc." Pinilit kong ngumiti. Kahit pilit.

Binigyan niya ako ng 2000 bill.
Napatingin ako sa pera. Malaki. Hindi ko alam kung matutuwa ako o manginginig.

Kukuha sana ako ng panukli nang nagsalita siya
"Keep the change. It's Berto's money."

"Uh okay po, thank you ho, Doc." Bahagya akong yumuko. Pilit na respeto.

"Doc?" I asked. Hindi pa kasi siya umaalis. Hindi pa siya tumitingin sa akin. Pero naroon lang siya. Parang may gusto pang sabihin.

"Have you eaten already?" Mahina ang boses niya. Hindi ko agad naintindihan.

"Ano ho, Doc?" Napakunot ang noo ko. Maingay sa paligid. Maraming sasakyan. Nalulunod ang boses niya sa ingay.

"Berto told me if... have you eaten already," he asked, hindi tumitingin.

"Opo, Doc. Paki-sabi, tapos na po. Salamat po." And he just nodded forcibly and drove away, mabilis.

Lumipas ang isang Lingo. Sweldo ko ngayon kaya napagdesisyunan kong bumili ng Jollibee. Kahit saglit lang, gusto kong mapasaya ang mga anak ko. Ito kasi ang paborito nila.

Pagkatapos kong magbayad, napansin kong... nawala ang cellphone ko.
Parang biglang lumamig ang paligid.

Nagbayad muna ako. Kahit nanginginig ang kamay ko. Hindi puwedeng mawala 'yon.

Nandoon ang mga pictures ng kambal, simula pa noong bata sila. Hindi ko kayang mawala 'yon. Hindi ko kaya.
"Hindi...Hindi pwede" Gusto kong umiyak pero pinigilan ko.

Pilit kong inaalala... Saan ko huling nahawakan? Kanina ba sa jeep? Sa tindahan? Sa bangko?Sa hospital? Pero hindi talaga. Bukas ko na lang hahanapin. Hindi ko kayang wasakin ang gabi ng kambal.

"Nanay, mayaman na ba tayo?" tanong ni Marlic habang kumakain ng french fries at isinawsaw sa sundae. Napatingin ako sa kanya, ang inosente ng tanong, pero ang bigat sa puso.

Napatawa ako. Pinilit kong gawing magaan ang gabi.

"Very good kasi kayo sabi ni Ma'am, kaya may pa-Jollibee si Nanay —" Isang paalala na kahit pagod, may dahilan ako para ngumiti.

Naputol ang pag-uusap namin nang may kumatok. Tatlong katok. Mabigat.

Naghugas ako ng kamay , naglakad patungong pintuan at binuksan. May kaba sa dibdib. Wala namang dapat, pero ramdam ko na.

Napasinghap ako. Parang huminto ang oras.

Si Malrick.
Magulo ang buhok, pula ang mata, parang galing lang sa pag-iyak. Gusot ang puting polo.

"This is yours, right?" He showed me my phone. Hes not angry, His voice sounds defeated.

Pero ang mas humatak ng atensyon ko: pinapanood niya ang wallpaper ko.Kami iyon ng kambal. Mas lalo akong natigilan—Alam na niya.

"Where are they... where are my kids?" He said it like he was begging. Hindi galit. Hindi sigaw. Kundi dasal.

"Tulog na sila bukas ka " Magsasalita pa sana ako nang—

"Nanay, kinuha ni Kuya iyong chicken ko." Si Marlic.

Napakagat ako sa labi. Hindi ko alam kung iiyak ako o tatawa. Dahan-dahan kong binuksan ang pintoan para sa kanya. He entered and was shocked seeing Marlic, and then Valrick, holding a chicken. Parang

nanigas siya sa kinatatayuan. Wala siyang nasabi—tulala. , parang hindi na kaya ng utak niyang unawain ang nakikita.

Hindi siya makapaniwala. Malrick suddenly massaged the bridge of his nose at tumingala, Like he's on the verge of crying,

Naninigas ang panga niya. Pinipigilan ang kahit anong emosyon na gustong kumawala. He faced and stared at them again.

Matagal. Tahimik. Parang may tanong, pero ayaw ilabas.

Pumula lalo ang mata niya. Halos mamuo na ang luha ng mag salita si Merlic

"Ikaw po ang tatay namin? Same po tayo ng eyes!" he said happily.

Matalino sila. At higit sa lahat, pakiramdam ko, alam nila kahit wala pa akong sinasabi.

"P-Pero h-hindi ka na po mag-work? Dito ka na sa amin?" humikbi na siya

" G-Ganoon kasi iyong tatay ni T-Tiboy, 'yong kaibigan ko sa ss-school." May tumulong luha sa mata niya. Hindi niya sinubukang punasan.

"N-Nag work sa malayo p-pero umuwi naman tatay ni Tiboy kasi v-Very good siya, sabi ni Ma'am." Parang may pinitik sa puso ko. Ganoon lang pala kasimple para sa kanila. Basta umuwi. Basta nandoon.

"K-kuya, siguro very g-good tayo ngayon kasi umuwi na si Tatay. H-hindi na ako pasaway kay Ma'am... para hindi ka na mag-work sa malayo," humihikbing sabi niya. Boses niyang basag-basag, pero punong-puno ng pag-asa. Maliit man siyang bata, ramdam mo ang bigat ng dasal niya.

I covered my mouth as I sobbed.
Hindi ko na kinaya. Ang tibok ng puso ko, parang sumabog. Ang mga luha ko, hindi na napigilan.

"N-No baby, t-tatay won't leave anymore." Garal-garal ang boses niya. Nanginginig. Pero totoo. Buo.

At sa paraan ng pagbigkas niya ng salitang "tatay"... ramdam mo ang lambing. Ang pananabik. Parang noon lang niya muling ginamit ito.

Tumakbo si Merlic at niyakap ang tatay niya.
Buong puwersa. Buong puso. Para bang ayaw na niyang pakawalan.

"H-hindi ka na magw-work sa m-malayo, Tatay?" he said as he cried.
Bawat hikbi niya, parang kurot sa kaluluwa.

Umiling si Malrick at hinalikan ang ulo ni Merlic nang matagal. Dahan-dahan, parang may hinihingi ng tawad. Nanginginig pa ang labi niya.

Nakita ko si Valrick, nasa isang sulok, umiiyak. Tahimik. Hindi umiimik. Pero ang mga luha niya sunod-sunod. Nakahawak pa rin siya sa Chickenjoy.

"H-heyy buddy, Tatay is here."
Boses ni Malrick, pilit nagpapakatatag. Pero basag.

Umiling lang ito at humikbi..Tumakbo papunta sa akin at umiyak ng malakas. Niyakap niya ang binti ko ng mahigpit. Parang ako lang ang mundo niya sa oras na 'yon.

Lumuhod ako. Inabot ko agad ang mukha niya, pinunasan ang pisngi niyang basa ng luha.

"Shh... 'di ba sabi mo gusto mong makita si Tatay mo?" I said while combing his hair through my fingers.
Hinahaplos ko siya para pakalmahin, kahit ang puso ko'y halos mabiyak na.

Humikbi siyang tumango. Umuo siya, pero punong-puno ng takot ang mga mata.

"C-come here, young man." Pilit ni Malrick, pilit inaabot ang anak.

Umiling lang uli ito.Natatakot. Sobrang takot.

Tumulo ang luha ni Malrick, kaya umiwas ako ng tingin. Hindi ko kayang makita ang ganoong klaseng sakit sa kanya.

"Bakit ayaw mong puntahan si Tatay mo?" I whispered as I kissed his head.
Boses ko halos walang tunog. Takot akong marinig ang sagot.

"K-kasi... 'yong sa dreams ko, Nanay... pag mag-hug ako kay T-Tatay... m-mawala siya bigla."
Umiling siya at napahikbi.

Parang pinupunit ang puso ko sa bawat salitang lumalabas sa bibig ng anak ko.

"Ayoko... ayoko mag-hug kay Tatay baka mawala... A-ayoko, Nanay. Masakit po dito ." Tinuro pa niya ang dibdib niya—ang maliit niyang puso.

Napaawang ang labi ko.
Parang nawala ang hangin sa paligid ko.
Oh my gosh.

Sunod-sunod ang pagtulo ng luha ko. Hindi ko na napigilan. Hindi ko na kinaya.

I hugged him immediately as he cried hard. Mahigpit. Parang gusto kong iparamdam na hindi na siya mawawalan muli.

Napahikbi si Malrick. Ito ang unang beses na narinig ko iyon.... basag na basag.

My gosh, naiyak ako habang nagsusulat nito.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 39

I walked to the mini sofa where they sat. Nasa kandungan ni Malrick ang kambal. I was holding two glasses of water.

"Uminom ka muna," I said softly. Tumango siya at kinuha ang baso.

Pinainom ko na rin ang kambal. Para talaga silang pinagbiak sa buho, parehong-pareho.

Pagbalik ko sa kusina, napasandal ako sa may lababo. Kung makulong man ako... kung tuluyan man akong iligpit ng mundo... at least maayos na ang mag-aama ko. Makakampante na ako kahit sa loob ng kulungan.

Tumunog ang katok. Pumunta ako sa sala. Binuksan ko ang pinto.

"B-Berto," I smiled softly.

"Nurse Solana," he greeted with a teasing grin.

"Sabi kong Solana na lang." Ngumiti ako.

"Nandiyan si Doc?" tanong niya, sabay bitbit ng maleta. Napapikit ako. Ang bilis naman. Parang may bagyo sa dibdib ko. Tumango na lang ako. Tahimik kaming naglakad papasok.

Pagkapasok niya, biglang napahinto si Berto. Napasinghap siya nang makita kami sa loob, ako, ang kambal, at si Malrick.

Tumingin siya sa mga bata, kay Malrick, tapos bumalik ang tingin sa akin. Nakanganga pa siya.

"Sayang ang popcorn," bulong niya sa sarili.

"You may leave, Berto," sabi ni Malrick, malamig ang boses. Agad namang natauhan si Berto. Umiling siya nang bahagya at ngumiti ulit bago lumabas. Nginitian ko rin siya, kahit may kabog pa rin sa dibdib ko.

Napailing na lang ako habang nakatingin kay Malrick. Kahit kailan talaga.

"I'll stay here," he said. It wasn't a question, it was a decision.

Tumango ako. Mahina lang. Walang lakas ang tuhod ko. Lumapit ako sa pwesto nila.

"Beh, tulog na tayo ha? May pasok pa bukas," I said gently, brushing their hair. Sabay silang umiling at lalong humigpit ang yakap nila kay Malrick.

"Hindi naman aalis si tatay," I added before I could stop myself. Biglang lumingon si Malrick. The look in his eyes... sharp, surprised, searching. Huli na. Nasabi ko na.

Tumayo siya. Buong lakas at pagmamahal, karga-karga niya ang kambal gamit ang magkabilang braso.

"Where's the room?" Tahimik akong itinuro ang kwarto. Sumunod siya. Tahimik lang din ako.

Maingat niyang inihiga ang mga bata. Sa pagod at kakaiyak, agad din silang nakatulog.

Tahimik.

"Where's the bathroom?"

"Uh... sa may kusina."

"Lead the way." Tumango ako at nauna. Nakita ko pa siyang may kinuha sa maleta bago sumunod.

"Dito," sabi ko, tinuturo ang pinto. Tumango siya. Pumasok.

Bumalik ako sa kwarto. Isa lang ang kwarto. Hindi ko alam kung saan siya matutulog. Siguro sa sala. Pumikit ako. Pilit pinapatulog ang sarili.

Biglang bumukas ang pinto.Bagong ligo. Sabon ko ang ginamit niya. Amoy ko. Pamilyar. Nakakakaba. Lumapit siya sa gilid ng kama. Akala ko, hihiga siya sa sahig o sa sofa. Pero hinalikan niya muna ang kambal sa noo. Akala ko tapos na.

Pero umikot siya at humiga sa likuran ko.

Niyakap ako mula sa likod. Mainit. Matatag. Buo.

Idinantay pa niya ang isang hita sa akin.

"Damn, baby," he whispered, voice low and raspy. "Your red panty

gave me a hard time taking a bath."

Hinalikan niya ang ulo ko. Hinigpitan ang yakap.

Nagpasalamat ako na patay ang ilaw. Kasi alam kong... kasing pula ng kamatis ang mukha ko.

Yung panty na nilabhan ko at sinabit sa banyo.

Hindi ko alam kung anong oras ako nakatulog kagabi. Basta sigurado ako—madaling araw na 'yon. Hindi ako makatulog. Dahil... dahil *'yung ano'* ni Malrick. Buong gabi, tumutusok sa likuran ko. Napabangon ako agad. Wala na ang mga bata sa kama. Tahimik na rin sa paligid. Tumingin ako sa orasan—8:00 AM na. Dali-dali akong lumabas ng kwarto.

Paglabas ko, nakita ko si Malrick. Nakaupo siya sa sofa, nakadekwatro, parang kalmado.

"I took the kids to their school already." Napapikit ako. Thank God.

Dumiretso ako sa kusina para maghilamos. Napansin ko ang isang paper bag mula sa mamahaling restaurant. Binuksan ko—tama nga ako. May tocino, longganisa, at kung anu-ano pa. Para sa almusal.

Papasok na sana ako pabalik sa kwarto nang magsalita siya.

"Let's talk." Tumango ako. Kinabahan. Umupo ako sa sofa sa tapat niya. Hawak niya ang cellphone ko. Pinapanood niya ang bawat video, bawat larawan ng kambal.

"I'll bring them to Manila," aniya, mata niyang nakatutok pa rin sa screen. "And I'll change their last name. They're screaming Demirian." Napakapit ako sa laylayan ng t-shirt ko.

"P-Paano ako?" mahina kong tanong, halos pabulong.Hindi ko na mapigilan, napaluha na ak

"You can come if you want," malamig niyang sagot.

"I-Ipapakulong mo ba ako?"Tuluyan na akong umiyak. Tahimik siyang pumikit. Minasahe ang ilong, para bang pinipigilan ang sarili.

"Hindi ako ang pumatay sa lolo mo, Malrick." Umiling ako. Hindi ko alam kung naniniwala pa ba ako.

"Hindi rin ako nagnakaw ng pera. Maniwala ka naman kahit kaunti sa

akin." Tumingin siya sa akin, at doon ko nakita, namumula ang mata niya.

"Please," sabi ko. "Magpa-investigate ka. Maging patas ka man lang... kahit para sa ina ng mga anak mo." At doon, tuluyan na akong bumigay. Umiyak ako nang todo. I cover my face using my two hands.

Maya-maya, tumunog ang cellphone niya. Tumayo siya para sagutin ito sa labas.

At... hindi na siya bumalik.

kahit mabigat sa damdamin, pumasok parin ako sa trabaho. Abala ako sa pag-aayos ng mga files sa table ko nang bumukas ang elevator.

"Nanay ko, bless po!" si Marlic.

"Nanay, bless po," si Valrick naman.

"Nanay, umiyak po ikaw?" tanong ni Marlic. Suot pa rin nila ang uniforms nila. Mukhang si Malrick ang sumundo sa kanila galing school. Napansin siguro ni Marlic ang mugto kong mga mata.

"Hindi, beh. Pagod lang si Nanay," sagot ko habang hinahaplos ang pisngi niya at sinusuklay ang buhok niya gamit ang mga daliri ko.

Nakita ko si Malrick sa likuran nila. Nakatayo lang siya, nakapamulsa, tahimik.

"Tatay, pwede ba dito muna kami kay Nanay?" tanong ni Marlic. Nginitian ko sila kahit may mabigat sa dibdib.

"O-okay lang ako, beh, punta kayo sa office ni Tatay at maglaro kayo doon, ha?" Pero biglang lumapit si Valrick. Ni hindi siya nagsalita, niyakap niya lang ako.

Napapikit ako. Hindi ko kaya. Mamamatay ako kapag nawala ang mga anak ko. Pumikit ako nang mahigpit. Pinigilan ko ang luha, pero parang mas gusto kong umiyak habang yakap nila ako.

Nang pumasok na sila sa office, nakita ko si Anna. Nanlalaki ang mata, laglag ang panga.

"M-May anak kayo ni Doc?" gulat niyang tanong. Napasinghap pa siya. Halos hindi makapaniwala.

"Puking ina. Ano 'yon, instant? Kakilala n'yo lang ni Doc tapos kambal

agad?" Napanganga rin ako sa reaksyon niya. Umiling ako at napabuntong-hininga.

"We had a past relationship, Anna." Mas lalong nalaglag ang panga niya. Para siyang nakakita ng multo na celebrity. Nangmakabawi ay nag salita sin siya.

"M-masarap ba si Doc?" tanong niya out of nowhere, bulong pero may kasamang kilig.

"Anna!" bigla akong namula. "Mag-tigil ka nga."Humalakhak siya nang malakas.

"Sure ako diyan! Carbon copy eh! Ganun daw talaga 'yon, 'no. Pag magaling ang lalaki at baliw-baliw si babae! Sa lalaki magmana lahat!"

Lalong namula ang mukha ko. Naalala ko tuloy... halos hindi kami nagpapahinga noon.

Napakagat ako sa labi at pumikit sandali.

"Stop it, Anna," bulong ko, pero tawa pa rin siya ng tawa.

" ito namn aparang hindi kaibigan , pero sure talaga ako eh, muscle palang ni doc parang kahit sa bato ako ibalibag , okay lang"

"Anna, baka marinig tayo—"

"Eh ano naman kung marinig? Malay mo, gusto ka niyang ibalibag ulit!"
At tumawa siya ng mas malakas, sabay kindat.

Pero kahit anong deny ko, hindi ko maalis ang katotohanan. Nandito na si Malrick. Nandito na rin ang mga anak namin. At kahit anong iwas ko, hindi ko na kayang itago ang katotohanang—buhay pa rin siya sa puso ko.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 40

"Come to my office," Malrick said through the intercom. Ilang oras na ang lumipas mula nang huli kaming magkausap.

Napangisi si Anna, pilyang kumindat pa. Napailing na lang ako at tumayo para puntahan siya. Pagbukas ko ng pinto, agad kong narinig ang iyak ni Marlic.

Naabutan ko si Malrick, naka-upo sa swivel chair. Nakaupo sa mesa ang kambal, parehong .Si Marlic umiiyak ng hikbi habang si Valrick ay tahimik, pero namumula ang mata. Kitang-kita ko sa mukha ni Malrick ang pagod, hindi sa katawan, kundi sa loob. Sinusubukan niyang patahanin si Marlic, pero halatang hindi niya alam paano.

Agad akong lumapit, hindi na nag-atubili. Naupo ako sa gilid ng mesa, sa tabi ng kambal, at niyakap silang pareho.

"Bakit umiiyak ang babies ko, hmmm?" tanong ko, malumanay

"Nanay... p-pupunta daw kami sa Manila?" tanong ni Valrick, mahina ang boses.

"Doon po kasi nagtatrabaho iyong papa ni Tiboy... malayo po 'yon," sabat ni Malrick, pero hindi niya ako tiningnan.

"Dito lang kami sayo, Nanay!" dagdag ni Marlic, humigpit ang yakap. Huminga ako ng malalim, pinilit ngumiti. Ayaw kong maramdaman nila ang takot na bumabalot sa dibdib ko.

"Sasama naman si Nanay," bulong ko.
"Talaga po?" sabay nilang tanong, parang sinag ng araw sa gitna ng bagyo ang ngiti nila.

"Oo, sasama tayo kay Tatay." kahit ako, nagulat sa sarili kong sinabi. Pero totoo iyon. Hindi ko sila kayang iwan

Minuto ang lumipas bago tuluyang huminto ang iyak ng kambal. Tahimik silang nakaupo sa tabi ko, habang ako naman ay patuloy sa paghaplos sa likod nila. Sa bawat sulyap ni Malrick sa amin, hindi ko maiwasang mapansin ang kirot sa mga mata niya.

12:00 noon nang sabihan kami ni Malrick na doon daw kami kakain sa Soy Café and Restaurant, isang kilalang kainan sa bayan.

"Tatay..." tawag niya sabay taas ng dalawang kamay na parang gustong magpakarga.

"Beh... baka madumihan mo si Tatay mo—" naputol ang sasabihin ko nang makita kong walang pag-aalinlangang binuhat siya ni Malrick.

Walang galit, walang alinlangan. Parang likas na lang sa kanya ang pagkarga. Na para bang hindi siya kailanman nawala.

"How about you, buddy?" tanong ni Malrick habang tumingin kay Valrick, "Want me to carry you too?"

"Big boy na po ako, Tatay," sagot ni Valrick habang umiiling,

Napasinghap si Anna nang makita kami. She even winked at me. Pinanlakihan ko siya ng mata kulang na lang sabihan ko ng "Tigilan mo 'ko!"

Pagbaba namin, damang-dama ko ang lahat ng matang nakatuon sa amin. Sino bang hindi mapapatingin? Nasa kanan ni Malrick si Marlic, buhat niya gamit ang isang braso. Sa kaliwa naman, hawak niya si Valrick. Diretso ang lakad, taas-noo parang sila ang may-ari ng daan. Well, technically... sila nga.

Nagwawagayway pa ng kamay si Marlic sa mga nurse na dumadaan. Pilyo talaga. Si Valrick naman, seryoso ang mukha. Nakakunot ang noo. Gaya ni, Malrick.

Pagkarating namin sa Soy Café, agad kaming umupo at umorder

"What do you like eat baby—" Napatayo ako ng tuwid. Parang may tumulak sa spine ko.
Pero nung umangat ang tingin ko, kay Velrick pala nakatingin.

Nakakahiya ka, Solana. Tumikhim na lang ako habang pinipigilan ang sarili kong magtago sa ilalim ng mesa.

And I just heard his chuckle as he kissed Velrick's head, Damn!

Marlic sat with me while Velrick sat with Malrick.

"May I take your order ma'am, sir?"

"What do you want, son?" he asked Velrick, who's busy eyeing the restaurant like he's the CEO.

"Chicken po sa akin, Tatay."

"How about you, buddy?" he asked Marlic, who's waving like a politician sa katabing table.
I caught his hand to make him stop. Mana rin sa tatay.

"Ano daw sayo, beh? Sabi ni Tatay." I asked him.

"Ice cream sa akin, Tatay. Dahil very good naman ako sa Math sabi ni Ma'am!" Sabi ni Marlic habang proud na proud

"Beh, kanin muna bago ice cream para hindi sasakit ang tiyan."

"Nanay ayawlo! Gusto ko ice cream, very good naman
ako." Sumimangot pa

"You should eat rice first, young man, then we'll have ice cream." Sabi ni Malrick na may halong authority ang boses. Biglang napa-straight ang likod ni Marlic.
Parang robot na tumango ito.
Napahinga ako ng malalim. Kala ko iiyak nanaman eh.

"How about you, baby—I mean, Solana?"N apatuwid siya ng upo ng wala sa oras.

Halos mabitawan ko na ang menu.

Biglang uminit ang pisngi ko. Damn, kung may upuan lang na may butas sa gitna, doon na sana ako dumiretso.

"Would you like some buttered shrimp?" I just nodded.

"We'll have three pieces of fried chicken, buttered shrimp, sizzling pork, chop suey, garlic rice, and spring rolls. For dessert, ice cream something decent, with proper toppings. If you have leche flan, bring that too," he said with calm authority, not even glancing up. The waiter, visibly nervous, fumbled with his notepad almost dropped his pen

I could barely touch my food because I was busy taking care of Marlic. Sa kanilang dalawa, si Velrick ang mas matured maybe because he came out a few minutes earlier?

"Marlic, son, come to Tatay so your mom can eat properly." Halos mabitawan ko ang kutsarang may lamang kanin.

"O-okay lang ho ako, Doc," I said quickly.

"Up now, buddy. Up," he insisted. Dali-daling lumipat si Marlic sa kandungan niya. Now both he and Velrick were sitting with their father.

"Ako ang unang kumandong diyan," I suddenly whispered.

"Come again?" he asked, eyebrows slightly furrowed.

Pagak akong natawa, trying to cover it up.
"M-masarap po, Doc. Masarap."

"What?" This time he sounded slightly irritated, confused.

"I-iyong shrimp po... masarap," I stammered, nodding quickly.
"Opo, ang shrimp... m-masarap."

He just ignored my flustered excuse and grabbed a shrimp. I thought he was going to eat it—but he peeled it quietly and placed it on my plate while still talking to the kids.

Damn. My heart's beating so fast.

"We're leaving this coming Friday. I have work waiting for me there, so we'll be flying on my private plane." I just nodded. Wala naman akong magagawa.

"Plane po, Tatay? May plane ikaw?" tanong ni Marlic, namamangha, halos malaglag ang kutsara sa gulat.

"It's ours, baby. I'll name it under your and your brother's name," Malrick said calmly—parang bumili lang ng fishball sa kanto. Walang ka-emotion-emotion, akala mo piso lang ang eroplano.

"May car din po kayo, Tatay?" dagdag ni Marlic habang kumikislap ang mata. Napalunok ako, napatigil sa pagsubo. Diyos ko, batang ito talaga.

"Yes, buddy. When you turn twelve, I'll buy you a car."
Sinabi niya 'yon habang umiinom ng tubig, parang wala lang.Baliw ka na talaga Malrick

"Anong kulay po, Tatay?" he added

"Whatever you want," sagot niya habang nagbubukas ng tissue.

"Wow, mayaman na tayo kuya, kesa kila Tiboy," sabi ni Marlic habang nakanganga sa tuwa, halos matapon na ang ice cream sa excitement.

Tiningnan pa niya si Valrick na abalang pinagmamasdan ang mga sasakyang dumadaan sa labas ng bintana, parang nagpipili na kung alin ang bibilhin.

Sumapit anng lunes at kailangan na naming mag trabaho sa hospital kaya si Aling Sally muna ang magbabantay sa kambal. Pagkauppo ko palang sa mesa ko kay binulabog na agad ni Anna ang tahimik kong buhay

"Bakit ilang araw nang mukhang puyat ang mukha mo? Magsasaka na ba si Doc ngayon?" Iyan agad ang bungad niya habang naupo ako sa table isang umaga.

"Magsasaka?" tanong ko sa kanya hapang may kinuha sa bag ko.

"Oo, inaararo ka yata araw-araw ni Doc"Namula ang mukha ko sa hiya at binato ko siya ng ballpen

Humalakhak lang siya, parang proud pa sa sinabi niya.

Mas lalo akong namula, lalo na't totoo naman. Ilang gabi na akong walang maayos na tulog.Iyong... iyong matigas na bagay ni Malrick, palaging sumusundot sa pwet ko!

Hindi na talaga ako makatulog. Isang beses nga, gumapang pa 'yung kamay niya pataas sa dibdib ko—at minasahe 'yon na parang ayos lang, na parang wala siyang tinapon na mabibigat na salita noon. Na parang kami pa rin. Na parang may "kami" pa talaga.

Nagsisimula nanaman si Doc! hayssssssssssssss

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 41

"Pero... iiwan mo na ba talaga ako dito? Ang lungkot ko na," sabi ni Anna habang nakaupo sa lamesa, halatang pinipigilan ang luha.

"Iyon kasi ang gusto ni Malrick, Anna," sagot ko, pilit na ngumingiti.

"Dadalaw ka rito ha? Madali lang naman 'yon. Mayaman naman si Doc, baka may pa-private jet ka pa!" Tumawa siya pero nagkakabasag ang boses halatang naiiyak na.

Tumayo ako at dahan-dahang lumapit sa kanya.

"Hindi ako umiiyak! Diyan ka lang—" pero hindi ko siya pinakinggan. Niyakap ko siya ng mahigpit. At doon na nga, sabay kaming napaiyak. Pero sabay din kaming natawa.

"Ang gulo natin," bulong niya habang humihikbi.

"Oo nga. Pero salamat, Anna," I whispered, my voice trembling as tears slowly began to fall.

I'm truly thankful kay Anna. Ang bait bait niya sa akin she always checks up on me, minsan pa nga may dala siyang pagkain. Hindi niya ako trinato na iba, kahit alam niyang may issue ako with Doc. In a place where I expected cold shoulders and judgment, siya 'yung nagpakita ng init ng pakikitungo. I don't know what I would've done without her.

"Huwag mo akong kalimutan ha? Yayaman ka na, papakasalan ka pa ni Doc. Kunin mo naman akong ninang sa susunod n'yong anak... o kaya, i-reto mo nalang ako, baka may pinsan, kahit maging kerida ako, okay lang, Solana," she joked, but her voice cracked as tears began to fall too.

"I will never forget you, Anna." I hug her tight. Napapikit ako. Forget? Parang sumikip ang dibdib ko nang isipin ko ang salitang 'yon.

Malrick gave money to Aling Sally bilang pasasalamat sa pag-aalaga niya sa kambal. Hindi lang basta pasasalamat malaking halaga iyon. Napaiyak si Aling Sally. Paulit-ulit siyang nagpasalamat habang yakap ang sobre, hindi makapaniwala.

Hindi lang siya ang nabiyayaan. Pati si Anna, doble ang naging sahod. Pinagtaasan ni Malrick ng sweldo bilang pagkilala sa lahat ng naging tulong nito sa akin.

Masaya ako sa lahat ng ginawa niya. Sa kabutihang ipinakita niya. Para sa mga taong naging parte ng buhay ko habang wala siya. may kulang. May puwang sa puso kong hindi ko maipaliwanag. Parang may bahaging hindi pa rin buo.

Pagkababa namin sa airport, naglakad lang ako nang normal, hawak-hawak ang maliit kong bag. Iniiwasan kong mapatingin sa mga tao. Pero bigla niya akong hinawakan sa baywang. Napasinghap ako. Parang huminto ang oras.

Sandaling nagkatinginan kami, at hindi ko na napigilang titigan siya. Seryoso ang mukha niya.

Napakunot ang noo ko. Parang may bumalot na makapal na ulap sa utak ko. Pumikit ako sandali. Tahimik akong nagdasal.

'Panginoon... huwag muna. Hindi pa ngayon.' Pagdilat ko, nandoon pa rin siya. Nakatingin pa rin.

"Something wrong, Solana?" mahinang tanong niya.Umiling ako dahan-dahan. Pinilit kong ngumiti kahit ramdam ko ang bigat sa dibdib ko.

"Wala. Napagod lang siguro ako." Hindi siya kumibo. Pero naramdaman ko ang higpit ng hawak niya sa baywang ko, para bang ayaw niya akong bitawan.

Tahimik kami sa loob ng kotse. Tinititigan ko lang ang labas ng bintana habang tinatahak namin ang pamilyar na kalsada. Napahawak ako sa dibdib ko. At habang si Marlic at Valrick nasa likod, tahimik na nakasandal sa isa't isa, pinagmasdan ko sila. Ayokong sabihin. Ayokong bigyang tinig ang pangambang unti-unti akong tinatalo.

"Saan tayo pupunta?" tanong ko.

"We're going to the penthouse. You've been here before, Solana," he said.

Natigilan ako. Parang may bumara sa lalamunan ko. Tahimik lang akong tumango.

"Nanay, ang dami pong buildings!" sabi ni Marlic habang nakadungaw sa bintana.

Gusto kong sabihin, *halos lahat niyan may shares ang tatay mo, beh.* Pero pinigilan ko ang sarili.

Pagkapasok namin sa penthouse, agad na tinanong ni Marlic, "Tatay, iyo po ito?"

"It's ours, buddy. Sa'yo, kay Valrick, at kay Nanay," sagot ni Malrick habang binuksan ang mga ilaw.

Tumigil ako sa paglalakad. Tumingin ako sa paligid. Lahat ay parang walang nagbago—ang kulay ng kurtina, ang amoy ng hangin, ang lamig ng sahig.

Namula ang mukha ko nang maalala ko kung anong mga ginagawa namin ni Malrick dito anim na taon na ang nakakalipas. Sa mismong sofa, sa kitchen counter, sa mismong pintuan ng kwarto.

Damn. Bakit parang biglang naging mainit ang pisngi ko?

Hindi pa ako nakaka-recover nang biglang bumukas ang pintoan at...Parang tumigil ang mundo ko. Napalingon ako, hawak ko pa ang dibdib ko hindi ko alam kung dahil sa kaba, gulat, o takot.

"Oh my God!" bulalas ng isang babae mula sa sala. Napasinghap siya nang makita ang kambal.

Malrick's mother.

"Son," bati naman ng ama niya, acknowledging our presence.

"Mom, I told you—we're just going to visit the hacienda," Malrick replied, clearly irritated.

"She couldn't sleep, son. Just let her be," sabat ni Tito habang hinawakan ang balikat ni Tita.

"Ito na ba sila?" tanong ni Tita, habang unti-unting napupuno ng luha ang mga mata.

"Ohh, Solana dear. It's been a while—" sabi niya sabay lapit sa akin.

"Tita," mahinang sagot ko.

"Tatay, sino po siya? Pareho po kami ng eyes," tanong ni Marlic

habang bahagyang nagtatago sa likod ni Malrick.

Si Valrick naman, hindi man lang tumingin. Busy pa rin sa paglalaro ng Lego. Napailing ako. Gaya ng tatay niya minsan, parang walang pakialam sa paligid.

"They're your grandparents, son," mahinang sabi ni Malrick.

"Go. Come to them." Lumuhod siya at bumulong sa tenga ni Marlic,

Walang pag-aalinlangan, lumapit agad si Marlic. Wala talagang hiya ang batang 'to

Lumapit si Tita, agad niyakap si Marlic. Naluha siya habang hinahaplos ang buhok nito.
"My apo," bulong niya.

"Buddy, play that later. Go to your grandparents first," tawag naman ni Malrick kay Valrick.

Tumayo si Valrick, nilapitan si Tito at niyakap ang mga binti nito.

"God! You look exactly like me," sabi ni Tito, sabay tawa habang niyakap ang apo.

"Granpa, may car po kayo? Gusto ko po 'yung black car!" bulalas ni Marlic habang nakatingala kay Don Valtar, puno ng tuwa ang mukha.

Napangiti si Don Valtar, at unti-unting lumambot ang kanyang mga mata. Para bang sa isang iglap, bumalik ang alaala ng sariling anak niyang si Malrick nung kasing-edad pa ni Marlic.

"Yes, apo. Meron si Lolo. Gusto mo 'yung black? Sige, sa'yo 'yon paglaki mo," sabi niya sabay haplos sa buhok ni Marlic.

"What else do you like, hmm? Lahat ng gusto mo, sabihin mo lang kay Lolo."

Napatigil si Marlic, saglit na nag-isip, tapos ngumiti. "Gusto ko din po ng malaking robot! At saka yung... yung may pool sa loob ng bahay!"

Napapikit na lang ako habang pinapakinggan ko ang pinagsasasabi ni Marlic.

Tita was about to approach me, her smile warm, her steps light, parang matagal na niyang gustong gawin 'yon. I saw it in her eyes, that longing to reach out.

But just before she could touch my arm, Marlic came to me, his little hands wrapping around my waist protectively. He looked up at Tita and gently shook his head. Tita paused. Her smile faltered for a second, but she quickly nodded in understanding. She turned around quietly and walked to the kitchen instead.

After an hour, they decided to go home. Tito and Tita took the twins with them, saying they wanted to bond with their grandkids. I couldn't help but smile. Napagaan ang puso ko.

Walang tanong. Walang panunumbat. Ni minsan, wala akong narinig na masamang salita mula sa kanila tungkol sa nangyari noon.

Ni hindi ko man lang naramdaman ang lamig na inaasahan kong sasalubong sa akin pagdating namin dito. Sa halip, yakap at ngiti ang sumalubong. Para bang walang anim na taong lumipas. Para bang hindi ako ang babaeng pinagtabuyan noon.

Sa unang pagkakataon, pakiramdam ko... tanggap na ako.

Hinatid muna ni Malrick ang kambal patungo sa elevator. Naiwan akong mag-isa sa penthouse. Tahimik. Malamig. Pero hindi matahimik ang puso ko.

Lumapit ako sa balcony, ang paborito kong lugar mula noon. Tanaw ko ang mga ilaw ng siyudad, gumagalaw ang gabi, pero parang ako'y nakabitin pa rin sa mga tanong.

Bakit ang bait nila sa'kin?
Bakit parang walang galit o pagkamuhi?
Ibang-iba sa inaasahan ko.

Napasinghap ako nang maramdaman ko ang yakap ni Malrick mula sa likuran. Mainit, mahigpit, pamilyar.

"I am very sorry, baby," he whispered as he kissed my neck.I tilted my head slightly to give him more access , para bang kusa—Diyos ko, Solana... *bakit ang dali mong bumigay?*

"The investigation started weeks ago," he began. "We found out Simon gave you the wrong syringe—because Ericka told him to."Napakapit ako sa glass railing ng balcony. Parang may humugot ng hangin mula sa baga ko.

"S-Simon?" I whispered, barely breathing. "He was my friend... Where is he? Can I visit him?"

"You still can't visit him, baby," he said softly as he leaned in and smelled my hair.

"Bakit? May tatanungin sana ako sa kanya. Hindi ko akalaing—" naputol ang salita ko dahil sa hikbi.

"I'm afraid you can't ask him that."

"Bakit nga?" I turned my head slightly.

"He's already in a mental hospital." Natigilan ako. The wind suddenly felt colder.

"He went crazy weeks after Grandpa's burial."

"S-saan galing ang impormasyong ito?"

"From Ericka. She confessed." Napatuptup ako ng baba ko. Parang may kumurot sa puso ko. Kaya ba... kaya ba takot siya sa akin noon? Kaya ba parang nakakita siya ng multo nang makita ako?

Bumalik sa isip ko 'yung itsura niya, yung nanlalaking mata, 'yung nanginginig na kamay na parang gusto niya akong takasan.

"Your girlfriend," I whispered, and I was about to break his hug. He stiffened, but instead of letting go, he hugged me even tighter. Parang ayaw niya akong pakawalan.

"She's not," he said firmly, almost like a vow. "You've always been my only girlfriend, Solana. The only one I ever wanted."

Tumigil ang mundo ko. Parang lahat ng sakit, lahat ng pagdududa... sandaling tumigil. Pero andun pa rin ang takot.

Tahimik kami pareho. Ilang segundo rin 'yon na parang walang hangin sa paligid. Kaya ako na ang nagbasag ng katahimikan.

"Kung ako lang pala... bakit mo ako pinaramdam na ako rin 'yung pinakamasakit?" Napaluha ako. Sinubukan kong maging matapang. Gusto ko talagang magalit sa kanya, gusto kong saktan siya ng mga salita ko gaya ng ginawa niya sa akin, pero hindi ko kaya.

Ayaw ko. Mahal na mahal ko si Malrick. At gusto kong sulitin ang bawat segundo ng panahong ito—itong sandaling magkasama kami, kahit hindi ko alam kung may kasunod pa.

"Malrick... hindi ako nagnakaw ng pera sa'yo." My voice cracked.

Masakit sabihin kahit totoo.

"I know, baby. I know. I'm sorry... I'm very sorry for spitting all those hurtful words."

"Si Mr. Solavan..." I whispered.

He straightened again. "What about him? The last I heard, he went bankrupt after Grandpa died."

Nanigas ako. Gusto kong magsumbong. Gusto kong isigaw kung ano ang ginawa niya.

Pero...

Wala.

Walang lumabas. Walang laman ang isip ko. Parang may butas.

Nanginig ang kamay ko.

I forced a smile and face him,
"Huwag na lang, hindi na mahalaga .Pwede ba tayong mag-picture?" He looked confused but nodde

I took a lot of pictures. Videos too. Every laugh, every smile, every kiss on my forehead. Kinukunan ko lahat, hanggang sa kaya ko. At sa gitna ng pagkuha ko ng huling video, napaiyak ako. Hindi ko na kayang pigilan.

"Baby... what's wrong?" Malrick asked gently, concern etched on his face.

"W-Wala," I sniffled, trying to smile through the tears. "Masaya ako, Malrick. Masayang-masaya ako."

. "Shh... stop crying, baby. I'm very sorry," he murmured against my hair. He pulled me into his arms without another word

"I'm very sorry for what Mallory did, sending you to prison." He kissed my forehead, soft and full of regret.

"I'm very sorry for wasting years... years I could've spent beside you." Then he kissed my eyes ,napapikit ako, ramdam ang hapdi ng luha at lambing niya.

"I'm sorry for leaving you alone during the entire pregnancy. That

must've been so hard." His lips found the tip of my nose gentle, like he was scared I'd break.

"I'm sorry for being a jerk... for being an asshole," he murmured, voice shaking slightly.

"I'm sorry, baby... but I will do everything—everything—just to make you mine again."

Then he kissed my lips. This time, it wasn't hungry.
It wasn't rushed.

It was an apology, a promise...
and a plea for one more chance.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 42

He kissed me deeply, and I closed my eyes. I broke the kiss and memorized his face, every detail of it. His perpetually furrowed brows, his hypnotizing eyes, the sharp nose, and those soft red lips. I let out a quiet sob as something hit me.

"Baby, please stop crying, What's wrong, hmm?" he said gently, cupping my face with both hands and kissing away my tears.

"I love you so much," I whispered. "You and the twins... you're always in my heart, no matter what happens."

His expression changed, confused, hurt, but I kissed him again.
He kissed me back, fiercely. Our mouths moved in sync.

"Open your mouth wider, baby. Let me taste you," he whispered against my lips.

His hands slid down sa leeg ko, dumausdos sa balikat, at humantong sa dibdib. He squeezed gently, making me gasp. Hinila niya ako palapit, and I could feel his hard, huge and demanding.

He took off my shirt and bra, lifted me easily, and kissed down to my chest. Nang isinubo niya ang utong ko, napasinghap ako, my fingers threading through his hair.He walked to the living room while carrying me and alternately sucking my nipples. I pushed him closer to my breast. He put me down on the living room carpet.

He then, began pulling off my jeans and underwear.

"Lift your leg," he whispered. I did. My head rested against the wall, my body trembling.

"Ahh... Malrick..." I moaned as he licked my wet part and sucked on the crown, adding two fingers without warning.

"Ah! Hmmm... Malrick, please," I moaned as he quickened his hand. Parang mababaliw ako sa bilis at sarap.

He stopped licking me when I came. He was about to kiss me when I knelt down and unbuckled his belt, pulling down his pants along with his boxers. Napapikit ako. Damn, it's bigger now compared to before.

He stared at me darkly, waiting for my next move.

I held him hard but gently, stroking with my hand. I licked the tip. Napatingala pa siya, lumalabas ang ugat sa leeg niya.

"Oh fuck!" he moaned loudly as he held my head and pushed me. Halos mabilaokan ako.

I rolled my tongue and licked him from his balls to the tip of his shaft. "Argh! Fucking hell!" he groaned.

I kept on licking when he suddenly pulled me up and kissed me. He lifted me, so I wrapped my legs around his waist. I could feel his hardness brushing against my wetness as he walked up the stairs, patungong kwarto.

"I can't take it anymore, baby," he said as he put me down and bent me over the stairs, entering me harshly from behind.

"Fucking hell! I've been dreaming about this—ahh, fuck!" As soon as he entered me, he moved fast.

"M-Malrick... ahh, m-masakit!" I cried. But he just grabbed my hair, pulled it, and kept fucking me hard from behind like he didn't hear me.

"I can't—ahh fuck, I can't, baby," he growled as he spanked my butt hard. Alam kong mamumula iyon.

"Malrick... ahhh, I'm... ahh, I'm near—please!" I held onto the steep stairs as he lifted one of my legs and pounded harder.
My breasts were already bouncing with each thrust.

We screamed when we both came. And I knew right there, he wouldn't stop. So he carried me into his room and put me on his bed. He flipped me, naka-dapa ako, my legs were on the floor and my body was on the bed—and he entered me in that position.

Napanganga na lang ako. My toes even curled as he moved harshly.

"Ahhhhh, Malrick!"

"Damn baby, you are fucking warm, so fucking tight"

"Ah! Ahh!" I kept moaning as I came. I was very tired, but Malrick flipped me again, carried me, and moved inside me so hard.

I bit his shoulder out of pleasure. Naka-bukaka ako. As he moved so hard, I could feel his balls bouncing against my butt. He fastened his thrusts as we went through his balcony room and put me down.

"Hold on to the glass, baby," he said.

I held the glass, slightly bent, when he lifted my right leg, placed it on the glass balcony too, and entered me hard.

"Oh my God! M-Malrick!"

"Oh hell! Oh fucking hell!" he groaned as he gripped my small waist and thrust hard and fast. I could feel myself being stretched so much. Napakapit ako ng maagi sa glass balcony sa sobrang bilis ni Malrick

"Baby, you're clutching my cock—I'm near!" he growled, then spanked my ass hard as we both came!

I leaned against him. I could feel his release running down my legs. God, I'm so sore. Minuto ang lumipas, when he gently massaged my breasts.

"M-Malrick, pagod na ako..."

"Hmm, yes. Let's get you to bed, baby," he whispered, carrying me in a bridal style—but suddenly sucked my nipple.

"They're so tempting, baby." Napapikit na lang ako when he laid me down on the bed. Umiling ako agad when he turned me over.

"Last one, baby." And he entered me in a dog-style position.

"Ahhmmm... ahh! Malrick ,.. m-mahina lang please Ahh!"

But that "last one" turned into three more . I don't even remember anymore. I just fell asleep after we both came.

I opened my eyes when I felt someone thrusting inside me, slowly. Damn it, Malrick. Nakakairita ka na! I looked outside. The sun was rising. Its probably 5 am.

I glanced back at him he was behind me, eyes closed, hair messy, clearly still sleepy.
But he kept thrusting, he even pull it out , then entered me again.

"Ano ba, Malrick? Masakit pa!" Sinapak ko ang braso niyang nakapulupot sa akin. Masakit pa talaga.

"Hmmm, baby..." he murmured, still thrusting slowly. Damn this man!

"Masakit pa nga!" I snapped. He just chuckled against my neck, then gently pulled out his hardness. Slowly, he turned me to face him.

"Good morning, baby." I just rolled my eyes.

"Abnormal ka na! Wala na sa katinuan iyang alaga mo!"

He laughed softly and slowly lifted my legs.

"Six years using only my hand—what do you expect, baby?" Then he entered me again slowly.

"A-Ahhh! Hmmm... Tangina..." I bit his shoulder when the pain hit me.

He began thrusting harder, gripping my legs tightly. The bed started shaking.

"Ahhh! Masakit pa sabi! Please s-slow down, Malrick!" He only nodded and kissed me but still thrust hard.

He stopped and pulled his hardness out. *Napangiwi na lang ako* when he climbed on top of me, lifted my legs onto his shoulders, and slammed into me—hard.

I could only hold my breasts as they bounced wildly.
God... Malrick.

I woke up around 3 PM, the sun already high outside the window. My whole body ached. Tangina talaga, Malrick. Napaiyak ako sa sakit literal. I could barely move without wincing. My thighs, my hips, lahat. It was like I had been run over by a truck... a very horny, relentless truck.

Just then, the door creaked open.

The twins came in, cheerful and energetic like always, while Malrick followed behind them, calm as ever—like he didn't just break me into pieces hours ago.

"Good morning po, Nanay!" Marlic said while running towards me.

"Good morning, baby..." I whispered with a hoarse voice, forcing a

smile even though I still felt sore down there. My heart softened a bit. Seeing their little faces always made things better.

Napatingin ako kay Valrick, na naka-upo na sa sofa habang nagbabasa ng libro parang isang munting ginoo.

"Nanay, Lola's house is very big po!" he said with excitement. I gave a small nod, smiling, even though all I wanted was a cold compress and maybe an ice bath.

He was about to climb onto the bed when Malrick gently lifted him away.

"No, buddy. Nanay is tired. Let's just play outside," he said smoothly, his voice calm and fatherly.

"Nag-play din kayo ni Nanay kagabi, Tay?" Marlic asked, innocently

My eyes widened slightly. Putangina, I shot Malrick a look.But the man didn't even flinch.

"Yes, baby, we played," he said like it was the most normal thing in the world.
He looked at our son with that usual cool face of his

"Valrick, son, come on." Valrick started walking but stopped, turned to me, and gave me the sweetest smile.

"Good morning po, Nanay ko." my heart.

"Good morning too , baby" He joined his dad, and just before leaving, Malrick looked over his shoulder.

"I'll be back, baby." and he winked. I rolled my eyes and let out a small groan as I remembered the memory of how many times he said "last one" last night.

Naririnig ko pa rin ang mga boses nila bago tuluyang magsara ang pinto.

"Tatay, anong nilaro niyo po?"

"Hide and seek, baby. Don't ask too many questions, buddy."

"Sali po ako?"

"No, that's for adults, young man."

And that's Dr. Malrick Virellus Valtar O. Dermirian III, everyone. HAHAHHA

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 43

Months passed, and everything seemed smooth, almost too smooth. Malrick enrolled the twins in a prestigious school owned by one of his friends. On their very first day, we got a call from the school. Marlic had already gotten into a fight.

Malrick had one of his maids from the hacienda transferred to the penthouse—"Para hindi ka na mahirapan sa mga bata," he said. Umangal pa ako, but well... Malrick is Malrick. You don't say no to him. Ever.

"Manang! Nakita n'yo po ang phone ko?"

"Nako, Solana. Palagi ka na lang talagang nakakalimot. Nasa center table sa sala, 'nak."
Napahinto ako. Napatawa na rin.

"Salamat po, Manang. Ako na po ang maggogrocery."

"Nako, magagalit na naman si Seniorito Malrick niyan..."

"Ako na po ang bahala, Manang. Sasama naman po ako kay Erickson."

"O siya, sige. Mag-iingat ka."

"Salamat po ulit." I hurried to the elevator and went straight to the parking lot where Erickson was already waiting. He opened the car door for me, like he always does, and I slid in.

"Good morning, Ma'am Solana."

"Magandang umaga rin. Kumusta na po si baby Katie?" I asked, referring to Erickson's daughter.

"Okay naman po, Ma'am. Nag-aaral na po at matalino pa"
Napahagikhik naman ako ng naalala ko palasalita iyong anak niya.

I later found out that Erickson got Aling Krosana's granddaughter pregnant. He is handsome, after all, and around the same age as Malrick.

Malrick even told me he had to give Aling Krosana a sari-sari store as a form of apology. Galit na galit daw kasi si Aling Krosana, she

threatened to kill Erickson. Apo niya 'yon, bagong college pa lang, tapos nabuntis agad?

I laughed so hard when Malrick told me that story.

"Erickson, ihatid mo na lang ako dito sa baba . Hindi naman ako magtatagal," I said as we neared the store. He hesitated, but eventually nodded.

I bought everything we needed at home. But just as I was about to step outside the store, I froze.

A nun. My eyes locked on her.

My hands trembled. Nabitawan ko ang mga pinamili ko. Nagkalat ang mga prutas. Nahulog ang tinapay. Natapon ang gatas.

"Mother... Mother Superior!" I whispered.

Panic surged through me. I didn't think. I ran—
Dali-dali akong tumakbo papuntang terminal. Sumakay ako ng bus.

Pabalik.
Pabalik sa bahay ampunan.

Pagkababa ko ng bus, halos hindi na ako makalakad. Umiiyak ako habang tanaw ko ang lumang bahay ampunan... ang tahanang minsan kong tinakbuhan.

Ang mga dingding na 'yan...Sila ang naging saksi sa bawat iyak ko sa gabi, sa bawat dasal na halos mawalan na ng boses, sa bawat pakiusap na sana... sana, may magmahal din sa'kin.

Pero walang dumating.
Walang umampon sa akin noon. Sabi nila, pasaway daw ako. Mahirap daw mahalin ang batang matigas ang uloPagbukas ko ng gate, halos manghina ako sa bigat ng emosyon. At doon, parang milagro—nakita agad ako ni Sister Luna.

Nabitawan niya ang plangganang dala. Tumakbo siya sa akin na parang isang inang matagal nang naghihintay sa anak na nawala.

"Sister Luna..." Napahagulhol ako sa yakap niya. 'Yung yakap na hindi mo aakalain na hahanapin mo sa buong buhay mo.

"S-Solana... Sol! Anak!" she sobbed, as if she couldn't believe it was me. Hinawakan niya ang mukha ko, at pinunasan ang mga luha ko

gamit ang nanginginig na kamay.

"K-Kumusta ka na, anak? Salamat sa Diyos... salamat at bumalik ka." Tiningnan ko siya.

At doon ko lang napansin may kulubot na ang mukha niya.
Ang dating malakas na boses, ngayo'y may pagod. May sakit.

Napapikit ako. Diyos ko... paano ko sila nalimutan? Ang sama-sama ko.

"O-Okay lang po ako, Sister. Si... si Mother Superior po?" Mahina kong tanong. May kaba. May takot.

Bigla siyang natigilan. Walang salitang lumabas sa bibig niya. Umiling lang siya... dahan-dahan... masakit.

At doon na ako tuluyang bumigay. Napaluhod ako sa lupa. Yugyog ang balikat. Nanginginig ang katawan.

"M-Mother Superior! M-Mother!" Paulit-ulit kong sigaw, parang batang nawawala.Wala na akong pakialam kung sino ang nakaririnig. Wala na akong pakialam kung mukha akong baliw.

Huli na.
Huli na naman ako.

I don't know how long I cried.Pero pagkatapos ng ilang minutong iyakan, inalalayan ako ni Sister Luna papasok sa loob. Tahimik. Mabigat.

"Sister... kailan po siya...?"Hindi ko matapos ang tanong.

Tumigil siya. Huminga nang malalim.

"Mga ilang buwan bago ka namin... pinatakas, Sol." Napasinghap ako. Parang may humigop ng hangin mula sa dibdib ko.

"Palaging malungkot si Mother Superior noon," bulong ni Sister Luna habang inaayos ang mga tasa.
"Hindi makatulog... may iniinda sa puso."Napahinto ako.Natulala.Parang may humaplos na malamig na hangin sa batok ko. Tumulo ang luha ko kahit pilit kong pinipigilan.

"Bakit... bakit ang daya naman..."

Bakit siya pa?
Bakit wala man lang akong pagkakataong makita siyang muli?

"Shhh... ganyan talaga ang buhay, Sol." Hinawakan niya ang kamay ko. Mahina.

Ang ingay ng tawanan, unti-unting sumisingit ang alaala ni Mother Superior.
Ang tinig niya.
Ang ngiti niya.
Ang mga mata niyang punô ng pag-unawa. At muli akong napaiyak.

"Tahan na, anak... tahan na," bulong ni Sister Luna habang yakap ako nang mahigpit.

Lumipas ang ilang minuto. Tinulungan ko siyang maghanda ng meryenda mga biskwit at gatas.
Tahimik.
Hanggang sa... nagsalita si Sister Luna habang inaabot ang tray:

"May tumawag pala dito, anak..." Napatigil ako.

"Nagpakilalang kapatid daw ni Mother Superior. Hinahanap ka. Kinukumusta ka. Moning daw ang pangalan... iyon ba ang tinirhan mo noon?" Parang may sumabog sa dibdib ko.

Napasinghap ako.
Nanginig ang kamay ko habang hawak ang baso ng gatas.

"S-Sister..." Tumigil ang mundo.
"Aalis na ako. Kailangan ko nang umalis."

Hindi na ako naghintay ng sagot. Dali-dali akong tumayo, halos matabig ang tray. Tinawag pa ako ni Sister Luna, pero hindi na ako lumingon.

Paglabas ko sa gate— Bumagsak ang balikat ko. Parang naubos ang lakas ko. Sumandal ako sa pader. Takpan ang bibig. At umiyak—na parang bata

"Nanay Moning..." Tinawag ko siya sa isip ko, sa luha ko.
"Nanay... Nanay..." Humagulgol ako mag-isa

At doon ko naalala—
Ang kambal.
Si Malrick.

Ang mga pinamili.

Napaupo ako. .Parang batang wala sa sarili. Ang sakit.Parang may humihiwa sa dibdib ko. Mabagal. Malalim.

Ang sakit ko... unti-unti nang lumalala.

Umiling ako. Paulit-ulit.

"Hindi... hindi... hindi..." Hindi ko matanggap. Ayokong tanggapin.

Tumingin ako sa paligid. Malabo. Parang nalulunod ang mundo.

Ipinikit ko ang mga mata ko, pilit iniisip kung anong araw na ba. Lunes? Biyernes?

Umuwi ako na parang walang nangyari.Walang sugat. Walang luha. Walang multo.
Tahimik lang.Kalmado sa labas... pero basag na basag sa loob. Nag-sorry ako kay Erickson. Sinabi ko na lang na pumunta ako sa bahay ampunan at wala na siyang tinanong pa.

Lumipas ang mga linggo, unti-unting lumalala ang kalagayan ko.

May mga araw na hindi ko na alam kung saan ko nilagay ang susi. O kung anong araw na ba.O kung may nangyari ba kahapon o panaginip lang lahat.
Napapagod ako...hindi sa katawan, kundi sa utak kong parang buhangin kapag pinilit mong hawakan, lalong nawawala.

One night, after Malrick made love to me, I excused myself to go to the bathroom.

At doon, sa ilalim ng malamig na shower, doon ako tuluyang bumigay.

Tahimik akong umiyak. Hawak ko ang bibig ko para walang marinig. Ayokong malaman niya.
Ayokong makita niya ,,kung gaano na ako nasisira.

Kasi...
mabubura silang lahat sa isip ko

Yung ngiti ni Mother Superior.
Yung hagod ng kamay ni Nanay Moning sa buhok ko.
Yung tawa ng kambal. Oh God! ang mga anak ko, ayaw ko, hindi .. hindi pwede

Yung mga mata ni Malrick habang tinitingnan ako na parang ako lang ang mundo niya.

Lahat sila...
mawawala.
At wala akong magagawa kundi panoorin silang maglaho.

Kinakabog ang dibdib ko sa takot.
Hindi pa nila alam.
Hindi pa nila alam na...

Minsan, paggising ko, hindi ko na alam kung sino ako.

At kapag dumating ang araw na iyon ang araw na makalimutan ko silang lahat..

Sana, kahit papaano.....

maalala nila ako.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 44

Lunes ngayon, pero itong si Malrick hindi na naman pumasok sa trabaho. Hindi ko na rin siya masisisi, dahil sa lahat ng pinag-gagawa namin kagabi.Namula ako nang maalala ko 'yon. Lalo na nung nahuli pa kami ni Manang na gumagawa ng milagro sa may hagdanan. Ewan ko ba kay Malrick— eh ang lapit na lang ng kwarto, pero hindi pa nakapagpigil.

Masakit ang katawan ko.As usual. Kaya heto ako ngayon nasa balcony ng kwarto, nagpapahangin habang nakasandal sa upuan, habang gumagawa ako ng scrapbook

May hawak akong french fries. isinawsaw ko siya sa sabaw ng sinigang. Hindi ko rin alam. Lately, ang dami kong kakaibang cravings.Parang kung ano-anong hindi bagay, pero kapag pinagsama ko, parang langit sa dila ko.

Tuwing nakikita ako ni Malrick na ginagawa 'yon, nakakunot agad ang noo niya. Hindi siya nagsasalita. Tinitigan ko lang si Malrick papalapit sa akin habang umuusok ang fries sa sabaw ng sinigang. Ngumiti ako.

"What is my baby doing, hmmmm?" Narinig ko ang boses ni Malrick mula sa likod ko,

"I'm making a scrapbook," sagot ko habang nakatuon ang mata sa mga litrato. "Hindi mo kasi ako pinayagang mag-work."

"I can provide for us, baby. Always." He chuckled softly and kissed the top of my head. Mapatingin siya sa scrapbook, puno iyon ng pictures. May mga petsa sa tabi, may mga maliit na kwento, sulat-kamay.

Para sa mga panahong baka makalimutan ko.
Para sa sarili kong alala.

Pagdating sa fifth page, napatigil siya.
Tumuro sa isang babae sa gilid ng litrato, nakangiti, may bitbit na manggang hilaw.

"Who is this?" Nag-init ang mata ko.

"N-Nanay Moning..." Pinilit kong ngumiti.
"Nag-alaga sa akin noon... n-nang buntis ako."

Hindi siya nagsalita agad.
Pero naramdaman ko ang pag-igting ng yakap niya mula sa likod.

"Would you like us to visit them in Mindanao?"Tumulo ang luha ko. Tumango ako ng sunod-sunod.

Kinabukasan, maaga pa lang, excited na akong bumiyahe.

Ako lang mag-isa. Wala akong sinama. Sinabihan ko si Malrick tungkol doon, una, nagalit siya.
Tahimik lang ako. Hanggang sa kalaunan, tumango na lang siya. Walang salita. Pero alam kong mabigat sa kanya.

Sumakay ako ng bus, bitbit ang ilang laruan at supot ng snacks.

"Sister Luna," tawag ko habang papasok, "may dala ho akong snacks at laruan para sa mga bata." Nang lumapit siya, halos mapangiti sa gulat.

"Nako! Nag-abala ka pa, anak. Ang dami nito abay, mamahalin pa!"

Ngumiti ako. Hindi ko agad masabi na *laruan ng kambal* ang karamihan doon.
Mga laruan na hindi na nila ginagamit. Hindi ko muna sasabihin kay Sister Luna na may anak ako.

Hindi pa ngayon.
Baka kung sino pa ang itanong niya bilang ama.
At... hindi pa maganda ang tagpo nila ni Malrick noon.

Inaya ko si Sister Luna na maglakad sa hardin, ang dating mundo ng aking pagkabata.
Dito ako tumatawa noon. Dito ako tumatakbo, nagtatago, at naghahanap.

"Sister Luna, maraming salamat po sa lahat... napakabuti niyo po sa akin noon at hanggang ngayon," sabi ko habang marahan kong hinawakan ang kamay niya. Pinisil ko iyon, mahigpit parang ayokong bitawan ang kabutihan niya.

"Ano ka ba, bata ka... para kang namamaalam," sagot niya, nakatitig sa akin nang may lambing. "Aalis ka na naman ba?"

"K-Kumilos na naman ba ang mga Dermirian? Hindi ba't pinahinto na ang kaso? Anak, 'wag ka nang umalis, ha?"

Natatawa akong tumango, kahit may kaunting pangamba sa puso ko.

"Sister... puwede ko ho bang makuha ang number ng tumawag noon? Yung kapatid ni Mother Superior? Tatawagan ko ho sana ngayon."

"Ay, oo! Teka lang, teka lang," sabay dali-daling umalis. Lumipas ang ilang minuto. Bumalik siya, hawak ang isang papel. Kinabahan ako habang binubuksan ang cellphone.

Nag-ring.

Pikit mata kong pinakinggan ang bawat beep. Parang ang tagal bago may sumagot.
Hanggang sa...

"Sino 'to?"

Napahikbi agad ako. Napatawa rin sa gitna ng hikbi. Wala man lang hello.

"N-Nanay... Nanay Moning .....mahal po kita," bulalas ko agad, habang tuluyan nang bumigay ang boses ko.

"Solana? Ay, Ginoo ko! Solana! Asan ka ngayon, ha? Sabi ng katapat mong apartment dito, bumalik ka na raw sa Maynila!"

Tinakpan ko ang bibig ko. Ayokong marinig niya ang lakas ng hikbi ko habang nagsasalita siya.

"Abay, ikaw talaga, bata ka... hindi mo man lang ako hinintay na madalaw kayo. Okay ka lang ba diyan, ha?" Tumango ako, kahit alam kong hindi niya ako nakikita.

"Agoyyy! Ang mga Amerikano ko si Valrick, si Marlic, mga apo ko! Bakit ang tahimik mo ba ha? Makukurot talaga kita, Solana!"

Hindi ko na napigilan.

"Nanay Moning.....Sabi ko ho... mahal ko po kayo..salamat ho sa ....l-lahat."

At doon na ako tuluyang umiyak. Hindi na hikbi. Iyák. Malakas. Buo. Basag.

Natigilan siya.

"Bakit... ay umiiyak ka bang bata ka? Hindi pa naman ako mamamatay, noh!" Biro niya, pero bumasag ang boses niya sa dulo.

"Ikaw talagang bata ka...Bakit hindi ka nagsabi kay Nanay Moning ha? Iyong si Tasyong—umiyak 'yon nung malamang umalis ka!"

Umiling ako. Alam kong hindi niya ako nakikita, pero ginawa ko pa rin. Hindi ko sinasadyang makalimot. Hindi ko ginusto na mabura sila sa alaala ko.

"Nanay... Mahal ko rin si Tatay Tasyong... Mahal ko ho kayo..." at umiyak ako na parang bata.

At sa kabilang linya—tahimik, nakarinig ako ng hikbi

"Abay, mahal ka rin naman namin! Bakit ba para kang nagpapaalam? Ikaw talagang bata ka... ....okay ka lang ba?" Napasara ako ng mata.

"Bagong ani naman ang palay—may pera kami. Pupuntahan ka na lang ba namin diyan?"

Umiling ako nang marahan, kahit hindi niya ako nakikita.

"Hindi po, Nay... Kami po ng kambal ang pupunta riyan. Kaya palakas po kayo, ha?"

Saglit siyang natahimik. Tapos, marahan siyang huminga.
Parang pilit niyang tinatanggap ang bigat na hindi ko masabi ng direkta.

"Aguroy , Solana...Kung may dinadala ka, sabihin mo lang. Hindi mo kailangang itago kay nanay Moning" Kinagat ko ang labi ko upang pigilin ang hikbi.

Mahigit isang oras kaming nag uusap ni Nanay Moning , sinulit ko na ang panahon habang naalala ko pa sila. Ang sakit sa ulo... pero mas masakit sa puso.

Nagpaalam na ako sa kanila bago pa man lumalim ang gabi.
Nagpaalam din ako kay Sister Luna, mahigpit ang yakap niya, parang ayaw akong bitawan.

"Ihahatid na kita, anak." Pero umiling ako.

"Kaya ko pa ho, Sister, salamat ho, babalik po ako bukas"

Paglabas ko ng bahay-ampunan, naglakad ako papunta sa kalsada para sumakay ng jeep. Pero bigla akong natigilan.

Saglit... bakit.. bakit ako nandito?

Saan ba ako pupunta?

Pumikit ako at pilit kong inaalala kung anong dahilan... pero wala. Wala akong maalala. . May mga dumadaan na tao... pero lahat sila, parang estranghero.

Hinawakan ko ang dibdib ko, kinakabog. Hinihila ako ng takot.

Napahikbi ako at Napaupo ako sa sementadong gilid ng kalsada. Hindi ko na alam kung ilang minuto na akong nakaupo roon.

Nawala ang ala ala ko. Hindi na naman ako maka alala.

Wala.Wala akong maalala.

Napatingin ako sa sarili kong kamay.Bakit nanginginig?Bakit malamig?

Anong araw na ba ngayon?Napasandal ako sa poste.Sumakit ang ulo ko.

"Tulong..."Mahinang bulong ng labi ko.

"T-tulong po , nawawala .....alaala ko" Napasandal ako sa poste. Sumakit ang ulo ko.

****

Alas-diyes na ng gabe nang bumalik sa akin ang ilang alaala. Bago ako sumakay ng bus, kinuha ko ang name tag ko. Nandoon ang pangalan ko, address, at ang numero ni Malrick, Para kung sakaling... kung sakaling hindi ko na naman maalala kung sino ako.

Tahimik lang ako sa biyahe. Pero tuloy-tuloy ang luha ko. Walang hikbi, walang ingay pero ang puso ko parang dinudurog sa bawat segundo.
Paano kung dumating ang araw na hindi ko na maalala si Malrick? Paano kung maging estranghero na rin ang mga anak ko sa mata ko? Diyos ko... ang mga anak ko.

Pagdating sa tapat ng building, huminto ako sandali. Pinunasan ko ang luha ko. Bago ako pumasok, itinago ko ang name tag sa loob ng tote bag. Ayokong makita ni Malrick. Ayokong makita niya ang takot ko. Ayokong makita niya ang paalala na unti-unti akong nawawala.

"Where have you been, Solana?" Bungad ni Malrick sa mababang tinig, pagbukas ko pa lang ng pinto.

Nakita ko siyang nakaupo sa bar stool, hawak ang isang basong may whisky. Tahimik. Mapagmasid. Hindi niya ako sigawan.
Pero mas masakit yata 'yung katahimikang iyon, yung parang binabalatan ako ng dahan-dahan.

Tumikhim ako.
"Uhh... p-pumunta ako sa bahay-ampunan, Malrick. N-napasarap lang ang usapan namin ni Sister Luna."

Tumango lang siya. Walang imik. Pero hindi niya inalis ang tingin sa akin, parang sinusuri ang bawat galaw ko, ang bawat pintig ng boses ko.

Akmang dadaan na ako, ilalampasan ko na sana siya at diretso sa kwarto...
pero bigla niyang hinawakan ang kamay ko.

Wala akong lakas. Dahil sa pagod at kaba, nahulog ang tote bag ko. Lumabas ang ang pink yarn na nakakabit sa name tag.

Napatingin si Malrick sa nahulog.

Dahan-dahan siyang yumuko at kinuha ang name tag na may nakakabit pang pink na yarn. Saglit niyang tiningnan. Binasa niya ng tahimik. Parang huminto ang oras.

*"Hello, ako po si Solana Suarez. May Alzheimer's disease po ako. Kung sakaling mawala ako at hindi makaalala, tawagan niyo po si Malrick ang asawa ko: 0907******"*

Napatingala siya nang matagal, bigla na lang umalog ang balikat niya, bumuka ang bibig niya, pero walang salitang lumabas,
Tinitigan lang niya ang name tag na hawak niya, na parang sinasaksak siya ng bawat letrang nakasulat doon.

Napahikbi nalang ako nag makitang sunod-sunod umagos ang luha niya.He dropped the name tag, pressing his fingers against the bridge of his nose.

A sharp breath escaped him—loud sob. Malrick is crying. He is crying hard silently.

"N-Natatakot ako...Malrick..." My voice cracked as I spoke his name, barely a whisper. Halos hindi ko na masambit ang pangalan niya,

"Hindi ko alam kung hanggang kailan pa kita maaalala..." a loud sob came out my mouth

"A-Ayoko..... ayokong m-makalimot" My voice trembled

"P-Pero parang wala akong ....l-laban." " Umiyak ako ng malakas, at doon na ako tuluyang bumigay.

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Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 45 SPPG

Bigla na lang bumigay ang tuhod ko.Napa-upo ako sa sahig, nanginginig. Hindi ko na kaya. Malrick rushed to me. Walang alinlangan. Walang tanong.

He dropped to his knees and wrapped me in his arms, tight.

"Shhhh... hey, baby..." His voice was low, warm, trying not to shake .He cradled my face in both hands, his thumbs warm against my cheeks, even as they wiped away the cold of my tears.

"There's nothing to be scared about," he said softly. Pero kahit pilit niyang palakasin ang loob ko, tuloy-tuloy ang pagbagsak ng luha niya.

"You forgot I'm a doctor, hmm?" He tried to smile, his voice full of false lightness parang nilalambing ako para kampantehin ang puso kong durog. He kissed my tears one by one. Hinaplos ang buhok ko.

Umiling ako. At doon na ako napahikbi nang malakas.

"A-alam kong... alam mo, Malrick, na w-walang lunas sa sakit na 'to..." I gripped his shirt tightly, parang dun na lang ako nakakapit sa buong mundo.

"M-makakalimutan ko ang mga a-anak ko...ang kambal ko" Napailing ako, at napasigaw sa iyak.

"Maka... m-makalimutan ko kayong lahat." I closed my eyes and forced the words out, like thorns in my throat.

"M-makakalimutan kita...k-kaya.....kaya wag mo nalang akong m-mahalin" I whispered painfully, like a confession I never wanted to say aloud.

He froze for a moment at umiling ng takot

"B-baby .. what are you talking-" napahinto siya ng nagsalita uli ako

"Magiging pabigat ako, mapapagod ka sa akin"

"You won't decide for me, Solana. No, you won't." His voice cracked, firm yet trembling with fear.

At doon ko hinawakan ang mukha niya. Pinilit kong itutok ang mata ko sa kanya—habang kaya ko pa.

"Naiintindihan mo ba ako? Makakalimutan nga kita, sabi! hindi kaba nakaintindi" my voice asked with a begging tone.

Tumulo ang luha niya. Umigting ang panga.
Hindi siya nagsalita agad.

Hanggang sa, mahina, basag, halos pabulong... "Then I'll court you again."

Napapikit ako at napahikbi ,

"P-paano kong maka limot uli ako? Paano.....paano.kong hindi kita maalala uli" Ang tanong ko'y parang suntok sa dibdib, hindi lang sa kanya, kundi pati sa sarili ko.

"Then I'll do my best to make you fall in love with me.....just like what I did years ago"

"As long as you're still here. " Hinawakan niya ang kamay ko at inilapat sa dibdib niya

His voice was steady, but his hands trembled.

"Even if you don't remember me, mamahalin at mamahalin parin kita, you don't have to w-worry" he said with so much love and kissed my hand, mabagal, magaan... pero puno ng bigat.

Tila sinusulat niya sa balat ko ang pangakong ayaw niyang mawala kahit sa alaala.

Matagal siyang nanatili roon. Hanggang sa, hindi na niya mapigilan... napahikbi siya ng malakas.

Umiling ako ng sunod sunod

" Ayoko..... ayoko masaktan ang mga anak natin, alam kong... alam kong iiyak ng malakas si Marlic.. pag sinabi kong hindi na siya maalala ni nanay, Iiyak iyon " Nanginginig ang boses ko habang iniisp ang kambal ko.

"si Varlic kahit tahimik yon ..magdadamdam 'yon.....Magtatago na naman 'yon sa sulok at iiyak mag-isa" Napahawak ako sa dibdib ko, pilit pinipigilan ang panginginig ng boses, para akong sinasakal sa sakit.

"Kaya.....k-kaya hayaan mo nalang akong l-lumayo' '

"No..... no... see this? " May kinuha siya sa bulsa—isang pulang kahon. Nang buksan niya ito, isang singsing na may makinang na diamante ang bumungad.

Hindi ko na napigilan. Napahagulgol ako. Nanginginig ang buong katawan ko nang isuot niya ito sa daliri ko

"This... this is not the proposal I planned..." Natawa siya ng mapait habang nangingilid ang luha.
"But baby... please... marry me."
Humawak siya sa kamay ko, mahigpit, parang ayaw na akong pakawalan kahit anong mangyari.
"Put your pain in me... I've got you... let me carry the pain for you... h-hmm?"

"Magiging mahirap 'yon, Malrick." Bulong ko, halos wala nang lakas ang boses.

"I know..." Hinawakan niya ang mukha ko, dahan-dahan, parang baka mabasag.

"It's not g-gonna be easy, but baby I want all of you, forever, you, me and the twins, e-every day. Wag mo naman akong iwan" New tears slipped from his eyes, quietly, like grief too familiar to scream.

Then he took a shaky breath, his voice cracking again as he whispered,

"I don't talk to God..... I..I never have. But I'd kneel today, right now, if that's what it takes. I'd pray until my voice breaks... and beg him to lets me carry the pain eating you alive"

I cried myself to sleep. Ang huling natatandaan ko, buhat-buhat ako ni Malrick, bridal style habang dahan-dahan niya akong inihiga sa kama at niyakap ng mahigpit.

Pinangako ko sa sarili ko na gigising ako nang maaga bukas.Magbo-bonding kami ng kambal.
Hindi ko sila palalampasin. Every minute matters to me now. Hindi ko alam kung hanggang kailan pa mananatili ang mga alaala ko. Kaya bawat tawa nila, bawat yakap, bawat tanong—even the smallest ones, gustong-gusto kong ikulong sa puso ko. Habang kaya ko pa.

I woke up around 3 a.m. I kept memorizing Malrick's face. Tears

formed at the corner of my eye.
Mahal na mahal ko itong lalaking ito. I kept staring at him, God knows for how many minutes.

Maybe he felt my stare, that's why he woke up. I hurriedly sat on top of him. His eyes widened, and he gasped.

"Baby, are you okay?" he asked in a sleepy voice.

"Malrick... please make love to me."

I didn't even let him answer. I just kissed him torridly. I sobbed as I kissed him. He broke the kiss and cupped my face.

"Please make love to me, mahal."I was begging him to take me.

And in an instant, we were naked.
I was on top of him, riding him as he moved beneath me hard.
I tilted my head back.

"Aahhh! Ahhhh!" I kept moaning as he hit my spot.

He flipped me over and entered me from behind. This was our fourth round, but his energy was still so high. God, Malrick is really irresistible.

"Ahhh!" I screamed in pain when he pulled out and slammed back in.

"It h-hurts! Aahhh!"

"I'm sorry baby—fuck—I can't slow down! Argh! Fucking fuck!" He moaned loud, desperate, almost like he was losing control of himself.

Parang hayok. Parang mababaliw. His voice cracked between pleasure and madness,

Bigla niya akong binuhat, at inilagay sa likod ng sofa. Pinayuko ako roon, at walang pasabing muling pumasok.

"Tangina... ang hirap magpigil," bulong niya habang bumibilis pa lalo.

"M-Malrick...ah! Malrick!" Tanging pangalan niya lang ang naisigaw ko, halo ng sakit, sarap, at pagkalunod sa kanya.

"I'm near, baby. I'm fucking near..." And we both came. I lost all strength and collapsed against the back of the sofa. But I guess Malrick wasn't tired at all—because he was still moving inside me as we

walked toward the bathroom.

Napaka-hilig talaga ni Malrick mag-imbento ng kung anu-ano. Thrusting while walking? Really, Malrick? We almost tripped.

He then faced me in front of the mirror. He stopped thrusting, but he was still hard, still pulsing inside me.

I closed my eyes tightly when he pulled out—then entered me again. He kept doing it, pacing himself like a pervert, while gently massaging my breasts and smirking at the mirror.

"Baliw ka talaga" I said, half laughing, half moaning

Then his hand slipped down. I gasped.
His fingers found my wetness and began massaging it in slow, deliberate circles—firm, knowing exactly where to press and thrust ao hard.

"Oh God! ahh! Malrick..." Kumapit ako sa kamay niya, habang ang sarap ay dumadaloy sa katawan ko, masyadong mabilis, masyadong matindi para kayanin.

He made me walk forward again, toward the mirror, still thrusting inside me, hard and relentless.

At that moment, I could feel my inner walls getting sore so sore I could barely stand.

"Hold onto the mirror, baby," he whispered in a low, commanding tone. Then he bent me over, grabbed a fistful of my hair, and started slamming into me harder. My eyes shut tight, and my hands gripped the mirror for support.

"You love this, don't you, baby?"I couldn't answer. I was too lost. I could only nod, biting my lip, moaning against the mirror's surface as he moved harder behind me.

"Lord, give me strength—or just give him a nap." I muttered tiredly under my breath when he lifted both of my legs and spread me wide open in front of the mirror.

And of course Malrick is Malrick. The man doesn't know the meaning of "rest." Pakiramdam ko, umalis 'yung kaluluwa ko sandali. He didn't stop... not until I passed out .

Ayoko masad kayo at the end sa chapter , nag iingay kayo sa comment section , kaya ayan! mag enjoy kayo HAHAHHA

Thank you very much to those who commented and voted. These help me write more. Please continue supporting me! MWUAHHH!

AUTOR'S NOTE:

Hello! I'm just a newbie writer, but I promise to give you the quality stories you deserve. 💖
Thank you so much for your support — every read, comment, vote, and share means the world to me!
It truly encourages me to write more stories and keep going on this journey.
Please continue supporting me — I hope my stories touch your heart.
✧

Lover, Vesper

CHAPTER 46

I slammed the gas pedal down. It's fucking 11 p.m. The streets are empty. No headlights. No noise. Just me and this rage sitting heavy in my chest. I gripped the steering wheel so hard my veins felt like they'd burst through my skin. I didn't care. I couldn't care. Not right now.

After we had dinner at that fancy steakhouse, everything changed. On the way back to the house, she went quiet. Her eyes wandered like she didn't recognize anything.
Like the world around her had turned into something strange. So I told Manang to take care of the twins.

I couldn't risk them seeing this version of her... or this version of me.

She didn't say a word. But I knew. I fucking knew.

"Don't you cry, fucker," I said as I wiped away one tear that escaped but another one was already falling.

I stepped on the gas again harder this time. The speedometer climbed fast top speed. Didn't even flinch. I pressed the horn the moment the gate came into view, long and loud.

They better hear me.

"Dad!" I stormed out of the car without waiting for a reply and went inside our house
"Fuck! Dad!" I yelled again, my voice cracking. My eyes were burning, vision swimming. Too much.

Then I saw him.

There he was, walking down the stairs, hurriedly. With Mom right behind him, both of them fixing their clothes, their hair, As if they were up to something. God knows what.

"You liar!" I growled, grabbing him by the collar of his robe.

"Malrick! Stop that!" Mom snapped, voice sharp with panic.

"You fucking liar!" But Dad didn't even flinch. Not a single reaction.

"Malrick, a-anak... ano bang nangyari?" Mom's voice trembled, her

voice sounds so unsure.

"Dad, you lied to me... You fucking lied to me," I said weakly, my voice was cracking.

"Mama..." I let go of Dad's collar and dropped to the floor, my knees giving out.

"My baby...Solana.. she can't remember anymore." The words cut deeper than I expected. I could barely breathe.

"D-Dad said it would take years before she'd forget all of us. But... fuck!" I laughed bitterly, wiping my face with the back of my sleeve.

"I just found out yesterday that she has that son of a bitch disease and now she can't remember anything." My voice broke .

"She looks at me like I'm a stranger, ma. Like I never existed in her life." I buried my face in both hands.

Mom stood frozen she's speechless. She had never seen me like this. Not like this. Not this broken.

"Dad..." I looked up at him my eyes are red, voice is shaking.
"This is the first time I've ever asked you for anything. Please... help me. You're the best Neurologist in the country. Please... help me bring her back."

"I'll see what I can do, son," Dad said calmly.

"Fuck! Hell no— "'I looked at him, eyes desperate." I don't want you to see what you can do. I want you to do it, Dad. Please." My voice cracked.
"She's my life... she's the twins' mom. Please... help her." Mom gasped softly, a sob escaping her lips as she covered her mouth. She ran to me and hugged me tight, like she was trying to hold me together.

Dad and Mom eventually went to London—searching for a cure, or maybe doctors who could offer one.

Several Months passed.
And all I could do was keep courting Solana, again and again. She could remember bits and pieces, but only for a short time. She started writing everything down in a diary, memories she wanted to keep, things she didn't want to forget.
But when her mind failed to hold on... the writing would stop. And i

always read it every day.

The twins... God, they were smart. They understood, even at their age. At first, they cried so hard, especially Marlic. But in time, they learned to accept it. They understood.

"Flowers for my baby," she gasped, almost dropping the scrapbook she made—
filled with photos, notes and details.

"Pinakaba mo ako, Arlick," she said, blushing as she placed the flowers on her lap and gently smelled them.

If it were a normal day, I'd probably get jealous, she keeps calling me different names. But not today. Today, it just hurts. Hurts so much for my Solana

"It's... it's Marlick, baby'", I whispered. The lump in my throat made it hard to speak.

"Marlick?" she asked, her brows furrowed, thinking hard.

"That name sounds... handsome," she added shyly, with a small smile.

I shut my eyes tight. Tears threatened to fall, and I couldn't stop them anymore.

"Yeah... and that's my name, Baby. You should remember that," I tried to joke, my voice cracking.

"Talaga? Kaya pala gwapo ka," she whispered with a soft laugh, her eyes now on the flowers I gave her.

"Gusto ko magka-boyfriend na kagaya mo... may asawa ka na ba? Kasi ako wala pa.. Pwede mo ba akong maging asawa?" she cleared his throat and looked out at the garden I had built here at the hacienda. We're staying here for now because I know it will be more peaceful for her.

"Maalaga akong tao, promise. Marunong din akong magluto." She said it shyly, her cheeks red but the moment her eyes met mine, something shifted.

She noticed. Her smile suddenly faded.

"Bakit ka umiiyak?.. ayaw mo akong maging asawa" Her voice softened, and sadness flooded her eyes as she saw the tears falling

freely from mine.

"You're already my wife, baby," I whispered. I sat beside her and gently held her hand—the one that wore our wedding ring. I lifted it, showed it to her.

"You're married to me." I said, my voice breaking as a sob escaped. Fuck... I couldn't help it.

"I'm your husband, baby... we got married last week." My tears kept falling. Damn!

""A-Asawa... asawa kita? Kasal tayo?" Her voice cracked as her tears finally fell.

God... why does she have to go through this? She shut her eyes tight. So tight, like she was begging her mind to remember. To find me somewhere inside the fog.

"Bakit hindi ko maalala?" she whispered, trembling.Then she looked at me with eyes full of pain uncertainty and longing colliding in her chest.

"Binibiro mo lang yata ako, sir... pero gusto kitang maging asawa, kasi..." Her voice broke. A sob slipped out before she could stop it.

She gently clutched her chest and cried

"Kahit hindi ko maalala kung sino ka... hindi ko alam kung bakit, pero alam ng puso kong mahal kita."

"Damn, baby," I whispered as I pulled her into my arms and held her tightly.

She froze for a second then I felt her hand move to her belly, like something inside her stirred the moment I touched her.

"Buntis ako?" she asked in a whisper, hugging me back as she broke down in tears against my shoulder.

"Yes, baby... you're four months pregnant. And we have twins" I said gently.

"I... I can't remember anything..." She broke down, crying hard as she shook her head, whispering over and over,

The twins are at Grandpa's house in Manila. I had to separate them

from their Nanay because Marlic kept crying every time he saw Solana.

Solana fell asleep in my arms, hugging the scrapbook she made and her diary.
I gently laid her down on the bed and carefully took the scrapbook and diary from her arms. I sat beside her, watching her chest rise and fall softly.

Then I opened the diary. I needed to know, what did she remember today?

Mr. Solavan molested me in my apartment... and

Tinulungan ako ni Nanay Moning manganak sa kambal nang walang anesthesia, mahal po kita nanay ko at .....

Nothing followed... maybe she forgot again.

My brows furrowed, and my hand trembled at what I read.

I stood up, breath heavy. I massaged the bridge of my nose as I looked at my wife sleeping peacefully, completely unaware of the pain I had just read.

I rushed to the garage as fast as I could. Once there, I grabbed and threw whatever I could get my hands on. Anything. Everything. Then I punched the wall fucking several time.

"Fuck... that son of a bitch," I sobbed.

My knuckles stung, but I didn't care.
I wanted to destroy something, anything because I couldn't go back in time and protect her.

"PUTANGINA!!!!!!! PUTANGINA!!!!!" I screamed, my voice breaking, as tears streamed down.

With trembling hands, I grabbed my phone and dialed.

"Mercir—"

"You son of a bitch!" he shouted the moment the line connected.
"It's 12 a.m., you fucker—"

"Shut the fuck up, Castellan." My voice shook with rage.
"Make Frederick Solavan rot in hell. H-He molested my wife"

The line went silent.

Then, a woman's voice soft, unsure, spoke on the other end.
"Mahal, who's that?" His wife, Malani.

There was a pause. Then Castellan's voice came back, low, steady, and cold.

"I'm sorry for what happened, dude. I'll make sure of it... that fucker rot in hell."

I looked up and froze, mouth open after the call.

"Fuck!" I broke down and sobbed.

What have I done to Solana?

Natatawa ako sa mga comment nyo, apaka ingay! ge, ipagpatuloy nyo yan! HAHA

Dahil grabe ang support niyo , Who should I write a story about next, Valrick? Marlic, Erickson, or Atty. Castellan?

Thank you very much to those who commented and voted. These help me write more. Please continue supporting me! MWUAHHH!

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Lover, Vesper

LAST CHAPTER SPG

"Beautiful in White" was playing in the background habang dahan-dahang naglalakad ang mga bata sa aisle.

A tear escaped from my eye nang makita ko sina Marlic at Valrick.

Marlic, all smiles, was happily tossing rose petals like it was just another fun game.
Pero si Valrick, para bang pinagsakluban ng langit at lupa nakasimangot, nakasalubong ang kilay, at hindi gumagalaw kahit isang hakbang.

I widened my eyes, giving him *the look* para lumakad na siya. Pero umiling lang siya. Tumayo lang doon, hindi man lang umusad kahit konti.

Pupunta na sana ako para kurotin ang batang 'yon, when suddenly, a hand slid around my waist,
down to my big, swollen tummy, at hinaplos iyon ng dahan-dahan habang hinalikan ang ulo ko.

"Let him be, baby," he whispered, voice deep and husky.

"Iyong batang 'yon, mana-mana sa'yong gago ka ," I muttered. He chuckled softly and kissed my forehead again.

"Don't be mad," he said. "The twins might go out any time now. Let's not ruin Anna's wedding."

Yes—buntis na naman ako. Kakapanganak ko pa lang last year kay Rourick Maximus,
and now, here I am, pregnant with another set of twins. Marlic and Valrick were so happy when they found out they were going to be kuyas again. Their eyes lit up with excitement

I looked at the man beside me. Hawak-hawak niya si Rourick Maximus, mahimbing ang tulog sa mga bisig niya. Of course, kamukha niya ang tatay niya kahit tulog, nakakunot pa rin ang noo.

Napangiti ako. Hindi na ako magtataka kung itong next set of twins namin, lalaki na naman... at mamamana nanaman lahat sa
kanya. Parang wala na talagang natira para sa akin. Lahat ng anak ko, mini-Malrick.

"Tangina!" I whispered as I held on to the sink, staring at the pregnancy test with two lines.

"Putangina ka talaga, Malrick!" I shouted. He quickly opened the bathroom door.

"Baby, what's the matter? Hmm?"

"Baby mo mukha mo! Magpakapon ka na, gago ka!" Nanlaki ang mata niya.

"H-Heyy, don't say that, baby."

"Buntis na naman ako, Malrick! Ni hindi pa nga one year old si Rourick!"

He smiled like a lunatic as he walked toward me and hugged me from behind, kaya siniko ko siya agad. Tumawa pa ang gago.

"Hmm... I can't get enough of you, baby. Fuck, I'm so in love with you," he said as he kissed my neck.

At tangina ko rin, dahil I tilted my head to give him access, letting him kiss my neck more.

"Ahhh!" I moaned when he sucked on my neck, leaving a hickey, while gently rolling my nipple between his fingers.

"Shhh... baka magising si Rourick," he whispered hoarsely.

Nanlaki ang mata ko.
"Edi tigilan mo ako! Tangina ka!" He just rubbed his hardness against me, and I gripped the sink tightly.

"I can't stop, baby. I want you so bad," he growled, still kissing my neck as he slowly removed my blouse, shorts, and panty.

Napapikit na lang ako when he lowered his gray pants.

Nanlaki ang mata ko sa nakita.
"Malrick! Ni hindi man lang nag-brief?!" I said in disbelief.

"No use. You're going to take it off anyway," he smirked.

"Ako? Ako talaga? Mahiya ka nga sa sarili mo!" He just laughed and began massaging my wetness.

"H-Hindi ka pa ba pagod, Malrick? Kagabi halos wala tayong tulog!"

"No, baby. I'm even stronger than Nanay Moning's carabao."

Then he entered me , slowly, gently from behind.
Napakapit ako sa salamin at napapikit.
Damn... ang sarap, kahit masakit pa dahil kagabi

"Ahhh!"
"Fuck, baby!" We moaned in unison so loud, it woke up Rourick, who started crying.

"Gago ka talaga! Ahhh!" And just like that, he started moving faster, as if someone was catching us.

"You're reminiscing again, hmm? Was it me pounding hard behind you?" Nanlaki ang mata ko at agad ko siyang kinurot.

"Kapal mo! Magtigil ka nga!" He just laughed and kissed the top of my head.

"I love you," I said wholeheartedly to Malrick, leaning against him comfortably lalo na ngayon na si Valrick ay naglalakad na, nakakunot nga lang ang noo.

"And I love you too, so much, baby." He whispered back.

It's been a year since that text changed our lives. Papa, si tatay ni Marlick nakahanap ng gamot. It can't fully stop the forgetting, but now, it's mostly the small things I lose. Hindi na buo. Hindi na ganoon kasakit.

Madalas, mga maliliit na bagay na lang ang nakakalimutan ko.
Pero kahit papaano, mas maliwanag na ulit ang umaga ko.

Mr. Solavan and Ericka are already in prison for life. Thanks to Atty. Castellan, kahit wala akong maibigay na sapat na ebidensya dahil sa kondisyon ko, nagawa niyang ipanalo ang kaso.
He really is a god of law.

And as for Nanay Moning and Tatay Tasyong, Malrick bought a 50-hectare field near their house and gave it to them.

Originally, he asked them to move to Manila to help manage the hacienda, pero tumanggi sila., hindi raw nila kayang iwan ang lugar na kinalakihan nila. So instead, he gave them the land.

I love this man so much for being kind and generous to the people

who were kind to me, he never stopped courting me, looking at me, and fighting for me... even when I couldn't remember him.

I looked around. This is a grand beach wedding, Anna's wedding with one of Malrick's friends, Declan, who's both an architect and an engineer. Anna isn't pregnant, kasi kakapanganak lang niya to their son. The beach? Pag-aari ni Declan mismo.

I waved at Kalsey, who's also pregnant her fourth child with Erickson. Even Aling Krosana is here, proudly walking around like she owns the place. I mentally rolled my eyes when I saw her wearing that massive diamond necklace.
Mukhang todo spoiled siya ni Erickson.

Hanggang ngayon, hindi ko pa rin ma-imagine na nabuntis ni Erickson si Kalsey at the age of 19.
Nineteen! And now look at them four kids later.

Napailing na lang ako when I remembered, hindi naman talaga siya bodyguard ko noon. Malrick said Erickson was just bored. Erickson is one of his bestfriend.

Atty. Castellan is also here, with his wife, Malani.
Busy na busy sila with their triplets, who are now throwing wild tantrums like little monsters in formal wear.

Actually, all of Malrick's best friends are here.

After the party, we decided to go back to the hotel. Private property ito, tahimik, at walang masyadong tao.

But halos matumba ako pagkapasok namin sa hotel suite—

Wala si Rourick sa crib niya, wala na ang anak ko. And the hotel's window was open.

Napasigaw ako ng malakas isang sigaw na punong-puno ng takot. My heart dropped.

And everything went black.

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE:
This is not the end.

I will write Malrick's best friends' stories, and yes—Solana and Malrick's children's journey will continue, lalo na si Rourick—ALIVE NA ALIVE PO SIYA HAHAHA! Don't worry!

July 2 pa lang ako nagsimulang magsulat, and wala pa ngang one month, grabe na agad ang supporta n'yo!
Nakaka-touch sobra.

Please continue to support me ha?
Kasi kung hindi kayo mag-support... edi bahala na kayo diyan! *Char lang! kaon ug karlang*

Seriously—thank you so, so much, mga mahal ko. You give me the strength to write.

Salamat sa bawat basa, comment, react, at message.
Kayo ang dahilan kung bakit buhay ang mga characters ko.

Wmuahhh wmuahhh!
Abangan n'yo ang next stories—mas nakakakilig, mas masakit, at mas totoo.

Love you all to the moon and back!

JULY 2, 2025 - JULY 14, 2025

SPECIAL CHAPTER

"Bumangon ka na, Malrick. Pupunta pa tayo kina Anna."

"Hmm... yes, baby," he mumbled, but instead of getting up, he rubbed his hard-on behind me.

"Tangina ka, talaga!" I elbowed him and quickly sat up. He laughed loudly.

"Kakabwesit ka! Ang aga-aga!"

"Baby, come here... it's too early," he said, reaching for me. But I ignored him.

"Damn it, Solana, let's still cuddle,baby"

"Ano ba, Malrick! Tao ka pa ba?! Ni kahit pag-ihi kagabi, ayaw mo akong pagpahingahin!" I snapped, clearly annoyed. But that only made him laugh even louder, like I said something hilarious.

"Gago ka talaga," I muttered under my breath.

I didn't even bother arguing anymore. Wala na akong energy sa kabaliwan niya. I stood up and walked straight to the crib of our twins, Malren Dmitri and Malvic Danovin—

It's been a year since I gave birth... And it's also been a year since Rourick went missing. A year. Isang buong taon ng paghahanap, pag-iyak, at pananahimik. Malrick did everything, every single thing. He moved heaven and earth. Police. Private investigators. News. Rewards. Lahat na. Pero hanggang ngayon... wala pa rin.

Parang nababaliw na ako. For months, I mourned like he died. Hindi ako kumain ng maayos, hindi natulog. Minsan nga, tulala lang ako buong magdamag. I screamed. I begged. I lost weight. I lost pieces of myself.

Malrick never left my side. But I can feel it... he's breaking too. We lost him, my baby. But I have a feeling that he's still alive.

Naputol ang pag-iisip ko nang may yumakap sa'kin mula sa likod. Mainit. Pamilyar. Mahigpit.

"You're thinking of Rourick again?" he whispered, his voice low almost guilty for saying the name. I didn't answer. I couldn't. Parang tinusok ang dibdib ko. He rested his chin on my shoulder, gently rubbing circles on my arms.

"Don't be stressed, baby... we'll find him. We will. I promise you," he said, almost like he was convincing himself too. I closed my eyes and leaned into his chest.

How many times has he said that? How many times have I wanted to believe it again?But this time... I just nodded. Because if I spoke, I'd shatter.

Naputol ang malungkot kong pag-iisip nang bumukas ang pinto ng kwarto at lumabas si Marlic. Nine years old na sila. Binata na ang mga anak ko. Ang bilis ng panahon parang kahapon lang, nasa crib pa sila, nanginginig pa ang mga kamay kong buhatin sila.

Habang lumalaki sila, lalo silang nagiging kamukha ng ama nila.

The difference between the two is clear. Valrick is the quiet one, laging may hawak na libro, mas gustong mag-aral kaysa makipaglaro. He's very snobbish and intimidating, kahit bata pa.

Minsan nga, parang mini-version siya ni Malrick kapag seryoso. Yung tipong kahit hindi pa nagsasalita, tinatamad ka nang lapitan

Pero si Marlic... ay, Diyos ko, ang batang 'yon. Lahat ng kalokohan, nasa kanya. Palaging may pasa. Palaging may sulat sa notebook na kalokohan At halos linggo-linggo, may nakakasuntukan sa school. Wala talagang mintis.

"Nanay, Varlick doesn't want to come with us." ani ni Marlic habang tumatakbo papuntang sofa, dala-dala ang lungkot sa mukha. I raised a brow

"And why is that, young man?" Malrick asked him

"He said he'll just study," Marlic mumbled,

"No. We're all going. Take a shower now, son" His voice was firm, but not angry, just sure.
And like a scared little robot, Marlic nodded and marched off, following his dad's command without another word.

Pagkasara ng pinto, dahan-dahang yumakap si Malrick sa bewang ko.

Ramdam ko agad ang init ng palad niya habang dumampi ang labi niya sa leeg ko—banayad pero may kasamang pananabik.

"Baby..." he whispered, his voice low, rough, at halatang uhaw.
"I want you... I fucking want you now." I felt his breath against my skin, hot and desperate. His grip on my waist tightened, as if he was trying to hold back—but barely could.

"Malrick, pagod pa nga ako..." I murmured, but he just hummed and pressed a kiss on my neck malambing pero may init. I was about to swat his hand away when the door suddenly opened.

Valrick stood there, his forehead furrowed.

"Tatay, I don't want to go there," he said, arms crossed like a little boss. Malrick sighed but kept his hand lazily resting on my waist.

"We need to be there, even if you don't like it, son"

"It's still summer vacation, buddy, in case you forgot," he said, still caressing my waist—

"But Grandpa told me to study so I can manage his company."

"Fuck... Dad," Malrick muttered under his breath, then ran a hand through his hair.

"He'll give it to you anyway, even if you don't study. Now go take a shower, young man."

Valrick tilted his head.
"Will you give me a company too?" He said it so casually, parang nanghihingi lang ng laruan! napahagikhik nalang ako

"Yes, buddy. Go now." And just like that, he turned around proudly—parang nanalo sa lotto.

Malrick groaned and leaned his head on my shoulder.

"My children are so much like you, mahal. Lahat sila mana sa'yo... wala man lang nagmana sa akin " I said with a playful pout, crossing my arms as I stared at him.

I usually call him mahal kapag hindi ako nabubwisit. Pero minsan ko lang siya matawag noon, kasi araw-araw naman niya akong binubwisit.

"Maybe I'm the father?" he said sarcastically. I just rolled my eyes and was about to walk away when Malrick held my hand and pulled me into his arms.

"I love you so damn much, baby. Thank you for everything," he said gently, his voice full of warmth.

"And I love you too, mahal... so, so much," I whispered back, my heart full

He pulled my face and kissed me. I responded wholeheartedly. He kissed me deeply as he pulled the ribbon of my robe, and now I was fully naked in front of him, while he was still wearing his robe.

"On the bed, baby," he whispered. We walked toward the bed, and I was about to lie down when he shook his head.

"Ass up, baby."

"M-Masakit pa balakang ko dahil kagabi..."

"I'll take you slow from behind, hmm?" I just nodded like a kid and got on all fours, while he stood at the edge of the bed.

"Damn, this ass," he said as he spanked me. I just closed my eyes. I looked at the mirror beside us. Malrick was still in his robe, but it was already untied.

I saw him gently stroking his hardness as he stared at my wetness. Damn it, Solana, bakit ang dali?

He's really huge, I can't even deny that.

"Mahina lang—ahhhhmmm!!" I was about to warn him when he entered me fully and hard. I pushed my face on the blanket so the twins wouldn't wake up.

Malrick didn't waste any time—he slammed into me so hard. My eyes rolled back, parang umaabot na sa matres ko.
Wala na talagang kapani-paniwala yung 'I'll be gentle, baby' niya

"F*ck, ahh!" he growled lowly. I saw his reflection in the mirror. He even looked up and bit his lip to suppress his moans.

He suddenly pulled out, flipped me over, and lifted both my legs onto his shoulders.
I couldn't help but tear up from the mix of pain and pleasure. And

knowing Malrick, he won't be content with just one round—so he took me four times in a row.

That's why we were late to the event. Gago talaga!

It's Declan's birthday today. They decided to have a small party. As soon as we stepped into Anna's house, I could tell it was very modern. The walls were made of glass, the floors were shiny white, and the furniture looked clean and expensive. Of course, what did I expect? Her husband is an architect and an engineer, after all.

Malrick pulled me by the waist and kissed my head.

"I'll drink a little bit today, baby," he said. I just nodded. Marlic and Valrick were with us, but the other twins were at Malrick's parents' house. We passed by there before coming here. Marlic immediately ran towards the kids to play, while Valrick went to Declan with his dad.

"Tito Declan, you told me you'll give me a company!" its Valrick. "Yes, young man, I will." and he laughed hard That's what I heard before walking away.

Napailing na lang ako habang papunta sa garden since that's where the girls were.

"Pukingina, wala bang araw, Solana, na maayos ang lakad mo?" bungad ni Anna sa akin. She was drinking lemonade, since she's currently pregnant with their second child.

I just rolled my eyes. Bunganga talaga ng babaeng 'to.

"Hello, Malani," I said, ignoring Anna as I sat down. Malani just nodded and smiled.

Malani has this very cold aura. She has a few minimal tattoos on her arms, but they're still cute.

"Ano, hindi mo ako babatiin?" Anna said jokingly.

"Don't start, Anna. I still can't forget what you and Declan did in our room."

"Eh hindi nga namin alam na room niyo 'yon ni Malrick!" she said, then burst out laughing.

Malrick and I saw them having sex in our room sa hacienda. God,

they're so disgusting. Good thing the kids didn't see it—they never lock the door!

I wondered why Kalsey isn't here yet, she's late too

"Hello po," Kalsey greeted as she arrived—late, as usual. Sabay kaming napalingon sa kanya. I examined her closely—and my eyes narrowed when I saw it, A freshly baked hickey on her neck.

Gagong Erickson, ginawa pang appetizer si Kalsey.

She was wearing a yellow dress, and honestly, she looked like a teenager. You wouldn't think she already has four kids... or five?

"Tangina, Kalsey, taon-taon ka na lang bang buntis?" bulalas ni Anna, sabay tawa namin ni Malani.

"Umupo ka na, Kalsey" Malina said calmly. As Kalsey sat down beside me , I confirmed it, she's definitely pregnant. Gagong Erickson, panglima na 'to.

"Huli na raw 'to, sabi ni Erickson, ate Anna," Kalsey said shyly, trying to defend herself.

"Huli? Tatlo pa lang anak niyo n'un, 'yan din sabi mo sa akin! Ang liit-liit mong tao, pero taon-taon kang binubuntis ng hayop na 'yon!"

Namula ang mukha ni Kalsey. Napatawa kami ni Malani.

"Saan ka ba unang tinira ni Erickson, bat parang adik na adik ka?" Anna blurted out. Napahalakhak na lang kami ni Malani, wala talagang ka-filter-filter 'tong bibig si Anna. I wonder kung ilang litrong pasensya ang kinain ni Declan, eh halos hindi naman nagsasalita 'yon

"Sige na, tayo-tayo lang naman dito," Anna insisted, seeing how Kalsey looked like she wanted to disappear from embarrassment.

"Sa... sa Ducati motor niya po," Kalsey answered, almost whispering.

"Pwede ba 'yon? Hindi naman umaandar 'yon, 'di ba?"

"Uhh... umaandar po."

"Tangina!" I blurted out, and we all burst into laughter.

"Hoy!" Anna pointed at me, laughing. "'Wag kang pa-anghel diyan. Anong pinaka-walangyaang ginawa sa'yo ni Doc?" My face heated up

instantly. Kalsey was already giggling, waiting for the tea.

"Wala. Next question na." I tried to wave it off.

"Hoy, wala nang 'next question' next question dito. Spill!" Anna leaned in like a chismosa on caffeine.

I sighed. "Sa... sa ibabaw ng kabayong tumatakbo."

Napasinghap si Kalsey, and Anna froze like her brain just bluescreened. She exploded in laughter so loud

"Bruha ka talaga! Sinabayan mo pa 'yung kabayo! Hindi ba kayo nalaglag ni Doc?"

"Hindi, Steady naman 'yung kabayo... si Malrick 'yung hindi." Nagkatinginan sila ni Kalsey and screamed laughing, halos mahulog na sa sofa.

"Malani, ikaw na." Malani just shrugged.

"'Wag niyo akong isali."

"Sige na, Ate Malina," Kalsey said in a soft voice.

Malani shifted her position at tumikhim siya, parang magrerecite lang sa klase.

"He... devirginized both my holes." Napaubo ako sa tubig na iniinom ko.

Anna dropped her fork na parang may multo siyang nakita. Tinakpan ni Kalsey ang buong mukha niya gamit ang plato. Hindi na lang kamay—plato,

"G-Gago! Buti buhay ka pa!" sigaw ni Anna.
"Dalawang exit, ginawa niyang entrance?! Siraulo 'yong si Atty."

Tumulo ang luha ni Kalsey kakatawa. Malani just smirked, naglagay pa ng kanin sa plato niya. Parang walang nangyari.

"Ikaw ba?" I asked Anna, sabay kindat—just to make her face turn as red as ketchup.

"Hoy! Pamamahay ko 'to! Wag kayong ganyan!" she cried, clutching her lemonade like it was holy water. Napahagikhik si Kalsey.

"Bruha ka, wag ka nang mahiya-hiyain, wala ka namang hiya since 2017!" ani ko

Anna rolled her eyes, tinakpan ang bibig, and whispered,
"Ano... uh... 'yung BDSM."

Sabay-sabay kaming napasigaw.

It was already 9 p.m. when we decided to go home. We were casually talking to Malrick, his hand resting on my thigh, when he suddenly slammed the brakes. Parang muntik nang mawala ang kaluluwa ko.

"Fuck," he muttered, looking at the road behind us. Marlic and Valrick were still sleeping peacefully in the backseat.

"D-Did we hit her?" I asked Malrick.

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE:
This is not the end.

I will write Malrick's best friends' stories, and yes—Solana and Malrick's children's journey will continue, lalo na si Rourick—ALIVE NA ALIVE PO SIYA HAHAHA! Don't worry!

July 2 pa lang ako nagsimulang magsulat, and wala pa ngang one month, grabe na agad ang supporta n'yo!
Nakaka-touch sobra.

Please continue to support me ha?
Kasi kung hindi kayo mag-support... edi bahala na kayo diyan! *Char lang! kaon ug karlang*

Seriously—thank you so, so much, mga mahal ko. You give me the strength to write.

Salamat sa bawat basa, comment, react, at message.
Kayo ang dahilan kung bakit buhay ang mga characters ko.

Wmuahhh wmuahhh!

Abangan n'yo ang next stories—mas nakakakilig, mas masakit.

Love you all to the moon and back! 💖✧

JULY 2, 2025

READ PLEASE

Hello everyone! this is Vesper.
I just wanted to address a lot of the comments on the last chapter.

Guys, this is the final chapter.
Many of you are saying there are still unresolved issues, or that it feels too bitin. I'm really sorry, but this is the end, not the end of the whole story, but of this part.

The unresolved issues will be continued in other stories, especially in their children's stories particularly Rourik's story. That's where many of the unanswered questions will be revealed.

Also, I wanted to explain why Solana isn't angry at Dr. Malrick. Guys! Her memories are fading, so for her, there's no more time for hatred. She just wants to create positive memories while she still can. As for why Dr. Malrick closed the investigation six years ago. That will be answered in Erickson and Kalsey's story, which is still ongoing.

I know it feels a bit bitin, but I hope you can stick around and enjoy the rest of my stories.
Thank you so much for your support!

It's honestly overwhelming. I just started writing this story on July 2. I've been wanting to write for.....I don't even know how many years but I never had the courage. I just really wanted to write. Then one day, I woke up thinking: *What if I finally write Solana's and Doc Malrick's story?* Their story has been alive in my mind for so many years, and I just felt the need to put it into words.

I didn't expect such support from you all, and I'm truly grateful. Thank you so much.

SALAMAT KAAYO SA TANAN.

Facts about me? CHAR lang, kaon ug karlang!

Hmm... I'm a proud Bisaya and an English teacher. I teach foreign students. hihihi

Bayerss, love tamoooo mwauhhhh!